No. 993
Friday
14 Jan. 2000
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PRIVATE EYE

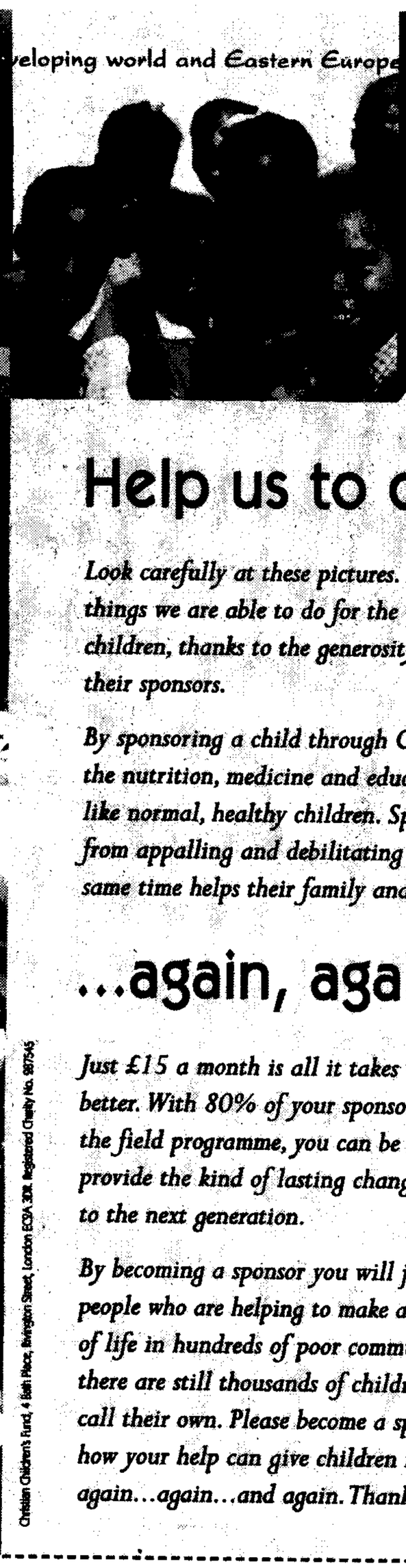
BLAIR'S DOME TRIUMPH

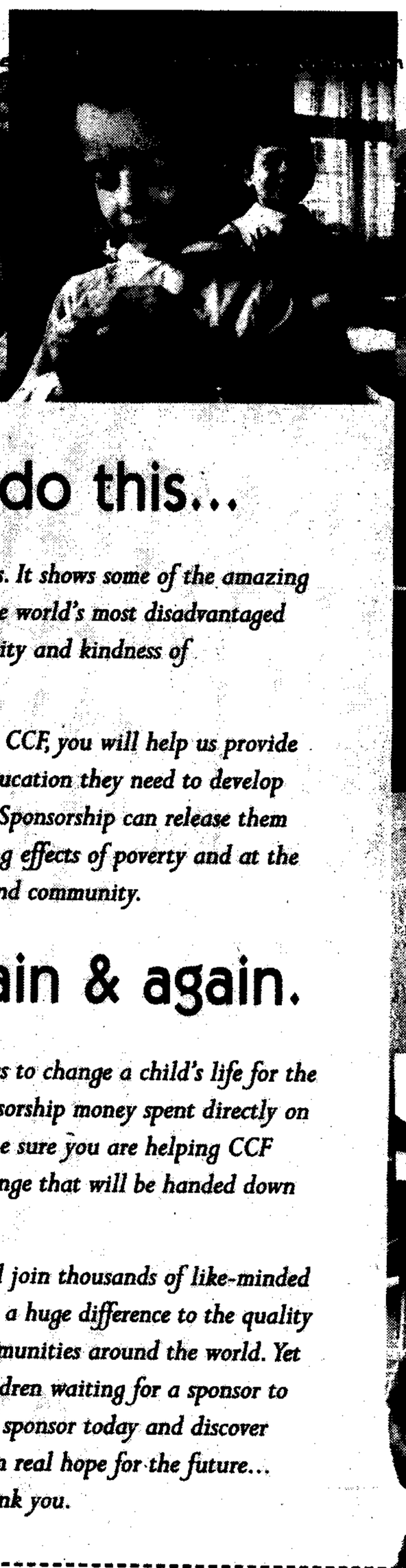
Is this the arse or the elbow?

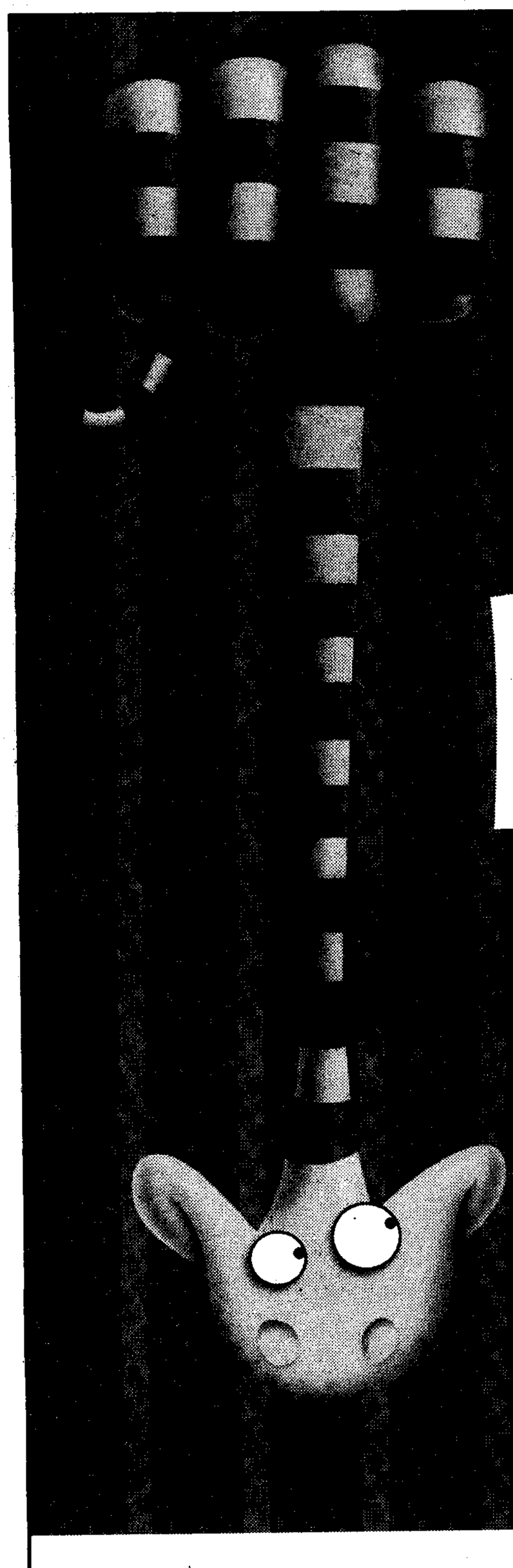
Let me through, I'm an idiot

I'm queuing to see the queues

Where's the Flu Zone?







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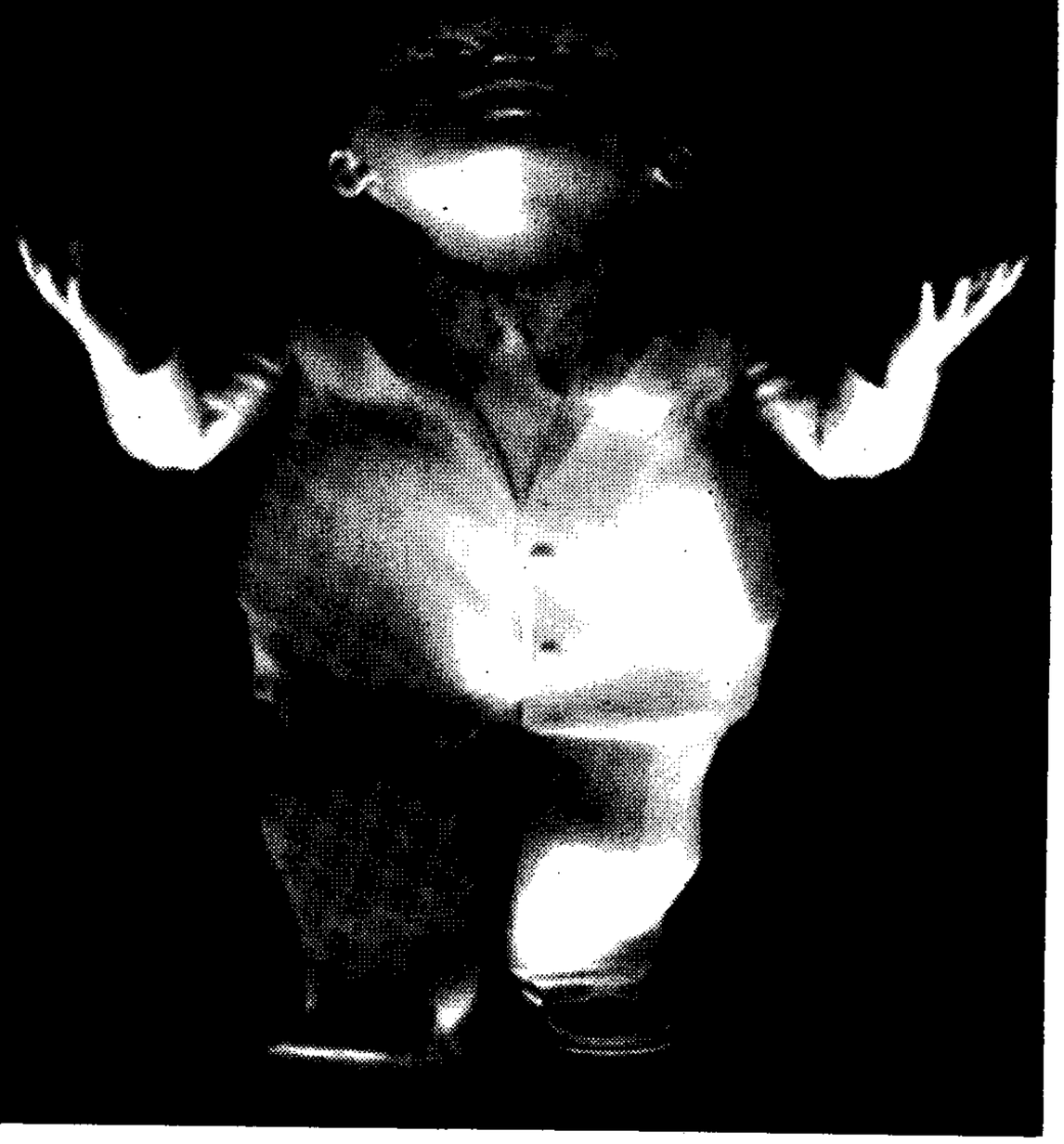

Gnome

An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that the so-called Millennium Bug was in some way going to disrupt the normal functioning of the world's computers, leading to global panic, disruption and the end of civilisation. Headlines such as "Computer Glitch Spells Trouble For 2000", "Yes – It's the Y2K Armageddon" and "Help – We're All Going To Die!" may inadvertently have led readers to believe that there were likely to be problems at the turn of the year.

We now realise that there was not the slightest foundation for any of this scaremongering nonsense, which only appeared due to the self-importance and incompetence of so-called responsible computer experts.

We apologise to readers for any distress that this confusion may have caused.

On other pages

Deadly Virus Sweeps Country! **3**
Yes, It's Flu-mageddon! **4**
Help – We're All Going To Die **5-22**

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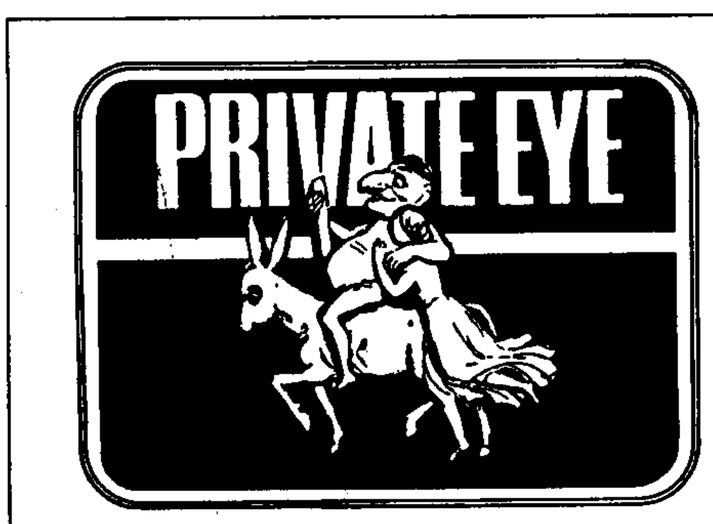
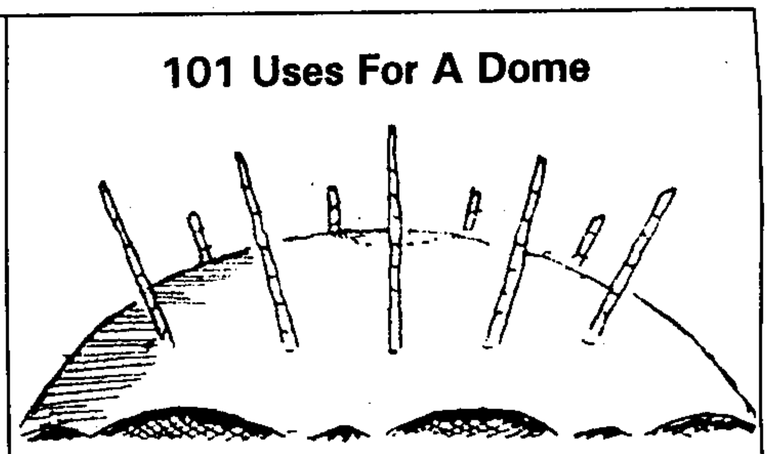




OBSESSED with sport and "showbiz", the millennial newspapers missed the main point of the new year's honours list – the distribution of gongs according to whether or not the nominee fits "the Blair Project".

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the list is the degree to which it pays its respect to the real architects of Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy: the arms dealers.

The most remarkable gong of all went to C.K. Chow, chief executive of military and engineering giant GKN. GKN exported the "Tactica" water cannon to Indonesia, where it did good service putting down crowd protests against the dictator Suharto and his successors.

Chow is a "new" Labour favourite, filling in on several task forces and committees from an area of industry where Labour supporters are often thin on the ground. Other representatives of the arms dealers who did make it on to the honours list were Martin Jay, managing director of warship manufacturers Vosper Thorneycroft, (CBE); Robert Turner, managing director of Graseby Dynamics, a subsidiary of military combine Smiths Industries, (OBE); and Keith Kirkpatrick, director of manufacturing and product improvement at the privatised Rosyth firm which looks after nuclear submarines (OBE).

"New" Labour's favourite arms firm remains British Aerospace, which has just bought the military bits of Marconi. Marconi has duly been showered with Blairite honours. Oliver Gershon, outgoing managing director of Marconi Electronic Systems, got a CBE; David Cleave, project manager, military space UK directorate of Marconi, got an MBE, as did Thomas Hammill, a technical director for Marconi Aerospace Systems and George Brown, a senior planning engineer for BAe subsidiary Royal Ordnance. Even BAe's test pilot, Philip Dye, and its occupational health nurse Caroline Morrison got MBEs.

The halls of two other rich men favoured by the prime minister have been sounding with the boom of gongs. Jane Reed, who for years has been the indefatigable PR-woman for Rupert Murdoch, intervening again and again to "set the record straight" for her adored boss, gets an MBE, as does Raymond Snoddy, once the hard man of Channel Four's *Hard News*, now the irrepressible creep of the proprietors as media editor of Murdoch's *Times*.

The real "new" Labour icons are the seriously rich, whom the prime minister adores. How else to explain the knighthood for WPP boss Martin Sorrell or John Mayo, another newly-honoured executive of Marconi. Mayo took home £877,000 last year and has a nest-egg of share options which he could sell tomorrow for £5m. Another knighted fat cat is Ian Robinson, chief executive of one of Labour's favourite companies, Scottish Power. Robinson's salary can't compare with Mayo's – it was only £515,293 last year – but then Robinson, when he is not sacking his own workers, sits on the Scottish new deal task force, where he assists the unemployed.

Robinson's knighthood was announced on the same day as the death of William Gallagher, a retired miner from Clackmannanshire, who froze to death when the emergency credit on his electricity meter ran out and his wife failed to keep the house warm enough with a £5 power card from Scottish Power.

FORMER Tory spin doctor Shaun Woodward's defection to "new" Labour and his pro-gay stance may not have surprised regular *Eye* readers.

They will recall a pen portrait of the Oxfordshire MP published in 1991 when he was appointed as the Tories' director of communications. It suggests the roots of his current mid-life crisis originate from his time at Jesus College, Cambridge.

It was here Woodward first explored his left-wing inclinations under the influence of the Marxist-structuralist don Stephen Heath. Shortly after gaining a first in English he underwent another formative period when he joined the set of homosexual architect Ewan McCloud.

Woodward is convinced it is the Conservative party that has shifted, not him. He announced to credulous hacks that he could no longer take the Tory whip because William Hague had refused to budge over the party's opposition to homosexuality "being promoted" in schools. But just how principled is Shaun?

"Very," says Esther Rantzen, who worked with him on *That's Life!* in the late 1980s. As Rancid warbled to the *Daily Mail*, she witnessed Woodward's growing closeness to his wife-to-be Camilla with whom he shared a deep and passionate opposition to the death penalty.

Sadly Shaun's principles, most notably over capital punishment and homosexuality, seem to have deserted him as he stood before the selection panel for the Witney division prior to the 1997 election. "I was present at Shaun Woodward's final selection meeting with 200 Conservatives," thundered former Tory mayor of Witney Stephen Hayward to the *Daily Telegraph*.

"During his speech and following a question and answer session, we were led to believe certain facts," wrote the choleric former mayor. "Shaun approved of fox-hunting; would support the reintroduction of capital punishment; would support the existing ban on homosexuals in the armed services; he was a mild Euro-sceptic and supported the 'wait and see' policy of John Major. Shaun was a loyal 'True Blue' Conservative and would be an excellent MP. On this basis he was selected... Shaun had obviously researched the constituency well."

Just the sort of chap to find a cosy new berth in "new" Labour, then.

THE long-awaited royal commission on House of Lords reform is shortly to recommend a revolutionary concept. A small number of peers are to be... elected! This will still leave, however, plenty of cronies for Blair to shove in to the Lords to make way for the next generation of energetic clones urgently on the look out for safe Labour seats.

As Labour limbers up for the next election, many of the Blairite young guns are keeping their powder dry for the inevitable clearing of safe Labour seats as the poll looms. The odd superannuated ex-trade unionist in the north-east can always be relied upon to clear off to the Upper House to make way for a thrusting newcomer. Top of "new" Labour's pops for pre-election shoo-ins are: James Purnell, a close Blair aide from the Number 10 policy unit; Pat McFadden from the same dismal stable; and Matthew Taylor, a former "new" Labour assistant general secretary, turned IPPR think tank wonker.

"There's Sneezy, Fluey, Achey, Grumpy, Dopey and Wheezy – but no Doc"

Street Of Shame

IN TIME-honoured tradition Tony Blair has tried to "buy-off" truculent hacks, or simply reward others who have distinguished themselves by the extent of their grovelling, through the honours system.

The fiercely meritocratic Robin Cook was particularly keen that veteran *Observer* columnist Neal Ascherson should carefully consider allowing his name to go forward for the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG). He did – and after some prevarication heroically didn't allow his name to go forward.

Channel 4 Newscaster Jon Snow, asked to consider having CBE behind his name, also wasted little time in saying thanks, but no thanks. The *Guardian*'s Polly Toynbee also declined when the letters "CBE" were flourished in front of her.

La Toynbee has been surprisingly reticent about the offer, denying to some that it had been made, and reticent also about her decision to turn it down. But could her decision be related to the strident tone she adopted in the *Grauniad* on 10 September last when she launched an almost proprietorial defence of the paper in the wake of excitable Fleet Street broadsides on Bob Gavron, the chairman of Guardian Media Group, who had made a substantial donation to the Labour Party.

A longstanding Labour supporter whose former wife is a Labour candidate for the Greater London Authority, he had also been awarded a knighthood. In mounting a defence of the newly ennobled Lord Gavron, Toynbee acknowledged that "for the paper's sake it would have been better if he had refused a peerage". In so doing, she was at pains to point out that "We have also mocked the distribution of honours to journalists... Our founder CP Scott refused a peerage."

It was thanks to the last minute hesitations, however, that this year's final honours toll fell two gongs short – 1,998 instead of the desired 2,000.

JUSTIN ETZIN was in the papers yet again over Christmas following his Mistletoe Party at the Ministry of Sound, where Euan Blair was photographed in a compromising position.

As older readers may recall, a similar stunt was pulled on Prince William at one of Etzin's shindigs a few years ago, thus ensuring maximum publicity for the wunderkind party-organiser which has continued unabated ever since. In *Tatler* two years ago he compared himself to Jimmy Goldsmith and claimed to be worth £6m. In the *Observer* list of "The Young Rich" he was valued at £2m. In an ITV documentary the next day, he was worth £6m again.

One of the most interesting pieces, however, appeared in the *Sunday Times* early in 1998, where Rupert Steiner, a regular Justin-puffer, reported that Etzin's party-organising business would float "at the end of next year" – ie 1999. Although 1999 has been and gone, there's still no sign of the promised flotation. Meanwhile, a visit to Companies House reveals that no fewer than eight of his firms – including the Mistletoe Party Ltd – have still not filed annual accounts or returns that were due last summer. Failing to file these on time is, of course, a criminal offence.

No doubt Etzin's many fans in Fleet Street will ignore all this when they next feel impelled to drool all over the boy genius; but one trusts that Tony and Cherie will be rather more careful next time young Euan wants to attend one of Justin's paparazzi-friendly extravaganzas.

ALTHOUGH he was rebuffed by Rupert Murdoch a few years ago in his attempt to buy the *Today* newspaper, Mohamed Fayed still dreams of becoming a press baron. Lunching with Rosie Boycott before Christmas, he suddenly announced: "You tell your boss Lord Hollick, I want to buy the *Express* for £300 million."

When Boycott said she thought it most unlikely that Hollick would accept, the Phoney Pharaoh revealed his Plan B: "If I can't buy a newspaper, I make my own: I will turn *Punch* into a daily."

As they say in Knightsbridge: fuggin' hell.

CRYSTAL BOLLOCKS

JONATHAN CAINER, the goblin-faced astrologer who has defected from the *Mail* to the *Express*, is not only the best-paid hack in Fleet Street. He is also a devotee of Maharaji, the tubby guru who founded the Divine Light Mission cult in the 1970s and has since grown fat (literally and otherwise) on "donations" from his followers – so much so that he is now even richer than Cainer himself, residing in a vast Malibu mansion complete with a fleet of limos and a private jet.

Late last year, investigative hacks at the *Express* were preparing a major exposé of Maharaji's empire. Just before publication, Cainer suddenly contacted the paper and offered to transfer his horoscope from the *Mail*. Pure coincidence, no doubt. Nevertheless, the Maharaji investigation was hastily spiked as Rosie Boycott welcomed Cainer aboard.

Express executives took the precaution of asking Cainer if he still had any connection with Maharaji, but he assured them that he had long since severed all links.

This is not quite the whole truth, however. Until a few months ago Cainer ran a website – www.enjoyinglife.org – devoted to glorifying the Maharji and his work. At the end of last August, after his involvement had been publicised in the *Eye* and the *Guardian*, he removed his name and his various articles from the site, explaining to friends that he had "unwittingly attracted media attention" and thus given the website "a higher public profile than it needs or wants to have". But, as he emphasised, his withdrawal didn't mean he felt any less devoted to the "great inspirational teacher". In fact, Cainer remains a regular donor to Maharaji's organisation, and is rewarded with front-row seats at the guru's public meetings.

Cainer is now claiming he left the *Mail* because he disliked its views on homosexuality, single mothers and suchlike. But rather less high-minded considerations may have played a part. His basic salary at the *Daily Mail* was about £75,000, and the premium-rate phonelines in his column brought in more than £200,000 a year, which he and the newspaper split 50-50, thus giving him another £100,000. He was also allowed to print a free daily advert for his new astrology shop in York, and to promote his "private horoscope" business through the column.

Even so, it wasn't enough. Six months ago Cainer was outraged to learn that a few other top *Mail* contributors were paid the same rate as him for double-page spreads. "How dare they!" he spluttered to a colleague. "I make this paper the bestseller it is!" He then demanded 75 percent of the proceeds from the phone lines, ie more than £150,000 pa, but chief boxwallah Laurie Sear refused.

The *Express* has been far more accommodating: though his basic salary remains at about £75,000, he will indeed now get his 75 percent rake-off from the dial-a-horoscope racket. More importantly for such a raving egomaniac, large photos of his goblin face are now splashed all over the *Express*'s news pages.

Incredibly Cainer also wanted to become a director of Express Newspapers. Rosie had to explain gently that milord Hollick was unlikely to comply, since having an astrologer on the board would make the company a laughing stock in the City. "Give me Lord Hollick's birth details and I'll cast a horoscope for him," Cainer suggested. "I'm sure he'd see sense then."

As a consolation prize, Boycott and her colleagues agreed to let Cainer play an active part in newsroom discussions, after he pointed out that his gift of foresight would be extremely useful in planning editorial coverage. Do you mean, one executive asked him, that you could have predicted that a Korean Airlines cargo plane would crash at Stansted airport? "Of course," Cainer replied. "It was the night of the full moon, after all." Thus the bearded soothsayer is now known to the newsdesk as "executive in charge of forward planning".

One development he hadn't foreseen was that the *Mail* would go to court to force him to work out his notice until the end of January. In one recent column, the entry for Scorpio – the sign of *Mail* editor Paul Dacre – read: "How magnanimous are you?... If you manage to let go of something you are tempted to hang on to, you will experience an almost immediate sense of relief." Cainer's entry for his own star-sign, Sagittarius, was equally revealing: "The countdown has started. It's only a matter of time before you get where you want to be." Even the cloth-heads at the *Mail* noticed what he was up to: the following day one David Wells wrote the horoscopes, with a small line at the bottom announcing that "Jonathan Cainer is unwell".

NIGEL Pratt-Dumpster began the new year in traditional style by boasting of the "unrivalled service" provided by his *Mail* diary in 1999. No doubt he was thinking of scoops such as his lead story on 16 December, which revealed that Sir Paul McCartney and Sir Bobby Charlton would receive peerages in the millennial honours list. "Don't say I didn't tell you," Dumpster added.

Alas! A mere two weeks later the honours list was published, with the names of Messrs McCartney and Charlton curiously absent.

Humpty Dumpster's new year resolution was "that this page will be even more exciting in the year 2000", and this is one promise he has certainly kept. Last Wednesday, for example, he scooped the world by revealing that an engineer in Oslo, Dr Lars Torbergesen, is engaged to marry one Lene Mostue – whose sole claim to fame is that her older sister Trude has appeared in the BBC programme *Vets to the Rescue*.

SO WHO are the generous chaps bankrolling Neil Hamilton? According to the *Daily Mail* of 22 December, "the biggest contributor is understood to be wealthy Greek sportsman and *Spectator* columnist Taki. Writer Simon Heffer, the biographer of Enoch Powell, has also written a substantial cheque".

A day later, the *Mail* reported that "speculation was rife" about the indentities of Hamilton's financial backers. Taki was fingered once again, along with Norris McWhirter, Gyles Brandreth and "several serving MPs", but Heffer had mysteriously disappeared from the list.

Speculation is rife as to whether this sudden coyness might by any chance be related to the fact that Simon Heffer, when not writing biographies of Enoch Powell, is the chief political columnist for the *Daily Mail*.

"Their millennium flu is much more spectacular than ours"

IF it doesn't have the story it wants, the *News of the World* just makes it up, it seems.

Hence the Murdoch rag's "interview" with Alan Davies on 19 December about the comic's support for Arsenal. The matey Q&A had every fact wrong – which wasn't surprising because no one from the *Screws* had bothered to speak to Davies.

"It was complete fiction," he tells the *Eye*. "Not even a cuttings job – they just invented all the quotes."

THE *Eye*'s story in issue 991 about *Independent on Sunday* editor Janet Street-Porter's penchant for ranting and raving at staff missed one important point.

We concluded: "Who would have thought that the day would come when journalists at the *Indie* would furtively swap the telephone number of the UK Workplace Bullying Advice Line?"

Who indeed? Certainly not the advice line's founder, Tim Field, who points out that it started life following an article headed "Workplace bullies under the cosh" by Paul Gosling which appeared on 28 January 1996 in, er, the *Independent on Sunday*!

THE *Independent on Sunday* got a rare name check on the *South Bank Show* recently when music critic Michael White was wheeled on to talk knowledgeably about singing. Except he isn't the *Sindie* music critic any more as Janet Street-Porter has sacked him.

After 13 years White was fired in a three-line letter with no pay-off and no explanation. Street-Porter refused to talk to him and would not answer his calls.

Is this the same Street-Porter who boasted on taking over as editor that she had "the best critics in the business" and, shortly after, that she had made their classical music coverage "even better"? Is this the same campaigner against dumbing down who has now dumped the oldest serving *Sindie* writer because she can't face treating classical music seriously?

Surely not. White was voted "Least Boring Critic of the Year" by Classic FM, no less, so he is not exactly inaccessible. Perhaps the desperate Street-Porter just needs to fire someone before Kellner (Slim Boy Fat to his friends) fires her instead. In the meantime, White has been dumped.

SO farewell then, Will Hutton, who is leaving the *Observer* to run the Industrial Society. Farewell, too, to the *Observer*'s political editor Patrick Wintour, who handed in his notice last Friday. And, probably, to *Observer* hack Richard Reeves, who has been invited by Hutton to join him. And to another *Observer* stalwart, Martin Bright, who looks set to go to Brussels for the *Grauniad*.

At least a dozen hacks have left the *Absurder* voluntarily in the last year. Or, to put it another way, almost the entire newsroom has quit, apart from foghorn-voiced John Sweeney, Robin McKie and John Arlidge.

The man responsible for much of this exodus is Andrew "Baloney" Malone, the brash young news editor who once told hackette Lucy Johnstone that the paper should hire more women "because the beaver count isn't high enough around here". (It fell even lower soon afterwards, as Johnstone fled to the *Express*.) On another occasion, Andy McSmith pitched a story to Malone only to be told that it "sounds a bit political to me". A puzzled McSmith pointed out that this might be because he is in fact the chief political correspondent.

There was a brief moment of optimism in the newsroom shortly before Christmas when hacks heard that Malone had applied for the foreign editorship of the *Sunday Telegraph*. Alas, he made such a poor impression at his interview that an amazed *Torygraph* executive rang friends at the *Observer* to inquire how on earth Baloney had ever got a job there.

Nevertheless, Malone led editor Roger Alton to believe that he had indeed been offered the *Telegraph* post. Instead of calling his bluff and wishing him good riddance, the eccentric Alton decided he must keep Baloney at all costs: he promptly gave him the title of "executive editor" and awarded him a pay rise of £20,000.

WHEEL SHOCK!

HACKWATCH

New Year Honours

Most Imaginative Reporting

TOP wordsmith Brian Reade was despatched by the *Mirror* to cover the revels at the Thames. Deadlines being what they are, he had to file his copy for early editions before midnight – but still somehow produced a thrilling account of how "a 40-deep bank of open mouths, dropped jaws and bewitched eyes" had been "transfixed" by the River of Fire.

"It was a spectacle all those present on this cloudy but mild night will witness only once in a lifetime but re-tell many times... Two thousand candles were shot from 16 river barges forming a 200-metre high wall of fire which streaked down the Thames". In later editions, a sentence was hastily inserted admitting that "the River of Fire never truly materialised" – but Reade's vivid eye-witness report of the non-event was otherwise unchanged.

Most Timely Message

The *Daily Telegraph* asked countless celebs for their millennial messages to the world. Elisabeth Murdoch: "Be true to yourself." William Hague: "Be true to yourself." Catherine Zeta-Jones was even more profound: "To hide behind reality, to know something, to give something, whatever it is... We need all the help we need. We will not hide." More's the pity. In spite of this brave effort, the Fotherington-Thomas award goes to Paloma Picasso: "I would like somebody to invent a spray can for peace. I promise to go around the world and spray who and what ever needs it. I know I have a big job ahead of me, but such a worthwhile one!"

And a special Party-Pooper of the Year award to Harold Pinter, for being so gloriously true to himself: "I have no millennium message to give the f***ing world."

Most Overwrought Hack

"It did change everything," Bryan Appleyard revealed exclusively on the front page of the *Sunday Times*. "Arbitrary or not, it extended our temporary, mortal selves over the ages... It was a moment when 1,000 years of peace suddenly seemed to be a human possibility."

Not to be outdone, Euan Ferguson of the *Observer* described midnight as "that one sublime moment, stranded in time, when all things seem possible. When our human frailty and the infinite sadness it engenders can be set aside for a few seconds." But not for long. "The hangover has come," he added blearily, "as it always does."

Ferguson's colleague John Sweeney admitted to swilling some "disgusting" Sauternes on New Year's Eve, which might explain his opening sentence: "From Lambeth Bridge at five minutes to midnight, Big Ben loomed like a Victorian Scud missile and across the liquid history of the Thames the London Eye rose up, an alien spaceship doing a wheelie."

Most Ubiquitous Hack

As so often these days, the most prolific journalist in the land was Tony Blair, who somehow found the time to write an "EXCLUSIVE" feature for the leader-page of the *People* – which was every bit as exclusive as the articles he also dashed off for the *Sunday Mirror* and the *News of the World*.

Bel Mooney Award

This goes, by hallowed tradition, to Bel Mooney, who informed *Daily Mail* readers that she had "witnessed a miracle" two days before the new year, while lying in bed listening to Stravinsky's Rite of Spring on Radio 3. "Under the translucent turquoise heavens, vast purple clouds swirled over the falling sun, forming new shapes all the time – and then I realised the sky was shifting and the sun was setting in exact time to the music. It seemed impossible. But it was true... I lay transformed." In another piece, for the *Mail on Sunday*, Bel revealed that she had celebrated Christmas in a 14-foot Mongolian yurt in her back garden.

Whinger Of The Year

Dominic Lawson wrote a long piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* grumbling about his "almost intolerable" ordeal in having to queue at the Dome. But even this couldn't compete with Lord Rees-Mogg, who devoted his first *Times* column of the new year to complaining that his dog, Bella, had been upset by the fireworks on television. "She has taken 24 hours to recover from them, and is still feeling less than herself."

Herbert Gussett Award

In the *Daily Telegraph*'s issue for 3 January, the lead letter was from William Best of Great Bookham, Surrey. "Sir," he thundered, "Will someone please tell Tony Blair that *gentlemen* always stand to attention (thumbs in line with the seams of the trousers) during the National Anthem. I was appalled to see the Prime Minister, in full view of thousands in the Dome and of millions of television viewers throughout the world, standing next to the Monarch with his hands clasped in front of his stomach during the anthem, which marked the close of the official opening. What will we see next?"

Accuracy Award

The *Times*, once known as the paper of record, got into practice for the new era with a lofty literary editorial on 30 December, penned by editor Peter Stothard himself, which claimed that Keats was the author of "Home Thoughts From Abroad". Two days later, its front-page splash began thus: "Like the shadow of the summer eclipse, midnight rolls across the face of the earth at 775mph." All most poetic – except that actually midnight "moves" at anything between 0mph and 1,000mph depending on where you are in the world, and 775mph would be about right for southern Italy. The correct figure for the UK is 643mph. Oh, and midnight moved from east to west (hence all the excitement in New Zealand and Australia), whereas the shadow of the summer eclipse moved in the opposite direction, at about 1,570mph. Apart from these minor quibbles, the very first sentence in the very first issue of the *Times* was accurate in every detail. Well, at least the full stop was in the right place.

WEEKLY WORLD NEWS
THE COMPUTER CRASH OF THE MILLENNIUM!
JANUARY 1, 2000
IS THIS THE END?
ALL BANKS WILL FAIL!
FOOD SUPPLIES WILL BE DEPLETED!
THE STOCK MARKET WILL CRASH!
ELECTRICITY WILL BE CUT OFF!
VEHICLES USING COMPUTER CHIPS WILL STOP DEAD!
TELEPHONES WILL CEASE TO FUNCTION!
DEVASTATING WORLDWIDE DEPRESSION!
THE DAY THE EARTH STANDS STILL!

Front Cover of the Year: *The Weekly World News*, December 1999

Best Space-Filler

The *Independent*'s New Year issue had a large white space in its leader column. "The following blank space is not a mistake," a caption revealed. "You might think of it as the eye of the storm – a brief moment of calm in the midst of the hurricane of words, opinion and admonition that surrounded last night's special tick of the clock. The words that would normally fill this space would take the average person around two and a half minutes to read. So think of what's below not as something missing but as a commodity increasingly rare in a culture which is nervous about silence and emptiness. It is a modest gift of time from us to you." Cor, thanks. Only an incorrigible cynic would regard this generous "gift" as merely a way of filling up newsprint free of charge and letting the leader-writers bunk off early.

FORMER Ulster secretary Mo Mowlam's foul mood is unlikely to have been improved by revelations from "friends of Peter" that her replacement at the Northern Ireland office was mugging up books on Irish politics early last summer.

This was months before the disgraced former trade minister was rehabilitated and given her job. But Peter Mandelson's selfless devotion had nothing to do with the ferocious behind-the-scenes briefing against Mowlam. Her mistake had been to underestimate the sullen misogyny of the Ulster Unionists and, more importantly, to have upstaged Tony Blair by receiving a standing ovation during the former's keynote Labour party conference speech the year before. (Robin Cook would be advised to ascertain Mandy's current bedtime reading material as he considers his prospects under Tony's "second term".)

With Mowlam and her currently unemployed husband, banker Jon Norton, reportedly seeking a lucrative publishing deal for her memoirs, Number 10 is increasingly anxious. Mowlam has been at the centre of "the Blair Project" from the beginning and as a prominent, although slightly distanced member (she remains, unfortunately for her, a woman) of the North East Mafia, Mo knows where the bodies lie.

Her reminiscences from months humouring and cajoling assorted Ulster boneheads, while ensuring that any glory was shared with Tony, will be of much interest – but not to Mr Tony. Any book which details just how Tony used Mo as one of his campaign coordinators for the Labour leadership election to dispel the completely implausible rumour that Peter Mandelson was in fact the real campaign manager might cause red faces all round.

OF THE 25 government computer disasters exposed in a recent damning report from the public accounts committee (PAC), the vast majority originated under the government's beloved private finance initiative (PFI).

How odd, then, that the PAC report names so few of the private firms responsible for what it calls the "delay, confusion and inconvenience to the citizen" and "poor value for money to the taxpayer".

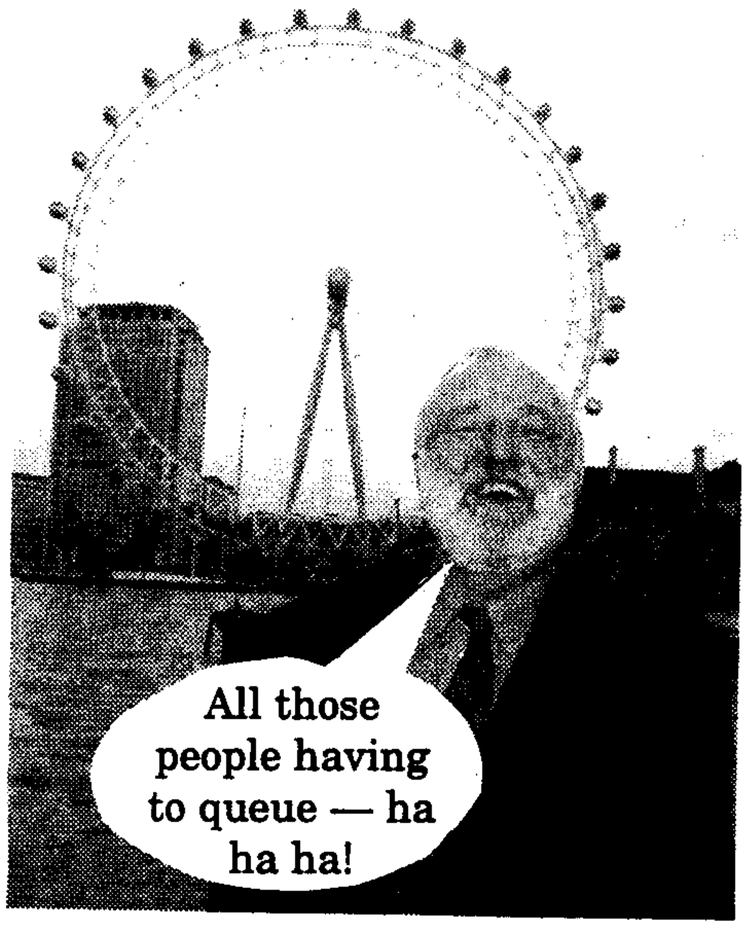
Why, for example, does the report finger Siemens for the chaos in the computerisation of asylum cases, but surprisingly leaves out the name of the company responsible for the fiasco at the Passport Agency — er, Siemens?

Only in passing does the report name Andersen Consulting as the company responsible for the unimaginable computer disaster known as NIRS (National Insurance Recording System). But it then deals in detail with the conflict of interest scandal — familiar to *Eye* readers, and originally exposed by the PAC — at the Wessex regional health authority, and somehow manages not to publish the name of the company responsible... er, Andersen Consulting.

Scared stiff by the report, the government issued two press releases on the same day. The first, from the cabinet office, was the usual bromide: ("we are determined to improve the management of major IT projects, etc") but the second from the so-called "Minister for e-Government", Ian McCartney, promised that ministers would be "tough on providers who don't deliver on time, on budget and who fail to improve services".

How the government plans to achieve that when many of the companies concerned are not even named in the public accounts committee report is not clear.

DOBSON ON THE NHS



HOW reassuring to see from a recent national audit office (NAO) report that social security money is being targeted at those groups who need it most... lawyers and accountants.

The report looks at one of the social security department's biggest private finance initiative (PFI) schemes to date, "the Newcastle Estates Development Project", which involves selling off the huge complex of DSS buildings in the north-east, then using the money to, er, rent back the properties to house the 13,000 civil servants who process benefits.

Some very needy firms have done rather well for themselves out of the whole business. The government originally estimated that the law firm Masons would be commissioned to do £70,000 worth of work. Its final bill came to £2,335,000. Financial advisers Kleinwort Benson, meanwhile, were to receive £123,000 for financial advice, but eventually bagged £404,000.

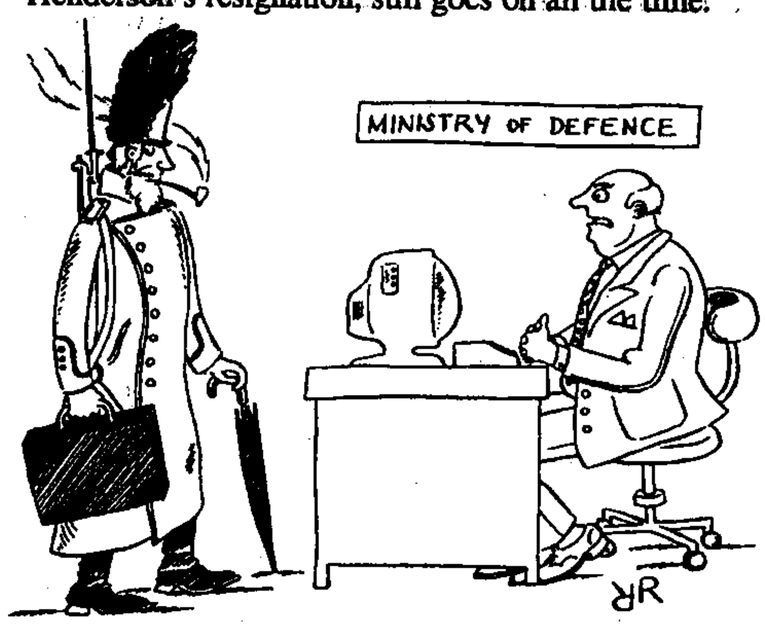
The PFI deal will cost an extra £51m over the 31-year lease period, but the NAO is unable to say whether it offers better value for money than a conventionally-funded project because the DSS has chosen not to provide any public sector comparison.

TO DISCUSS its scoop that Colonel Ian Henderson, notorious former head of "security" and torture in the dictatorship of Bahrain, had spent a jolly and uninterrupted Christmas in a house on the Devon moors, *Channel Four News* picked out a prominent politician for interview on 5 January: Ken Purchase.

The burly Labour MP for Wolverhampton North East was only too happy to oblige. He told Jon Snow that he entirely agreed that Colonel Henderson was a suspect character with a suspect past, and that the colonel certainly should be interviewed by police about allegations of his part in torture in Bahrain.

Listening to Mr Purchase, credulous *Channel Four News* punters might have imagined that Mr Purchase was an independent and fair-minded observer of affairs in Bahrain. A glance at several recent issues of the *Eye*, however, would have spelled out at least three relevant facts. First, that Mr Prentice is a time-honoured apologist for the Bahrain regime and its autocratic amir. Second, that Mr Prentice, in league with a front for the Bahraini and Saudi Arabian regimes, the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, regularly organises freebies to Bahrain for MPs who are showered with Rolex watches and other expensive jewellery by the amir. And third, that Labour MPs flock to take part in Prentice's freebies not only for the Rolexes but also because Prentice is a trusted aide of, and parliamentary private secretary to, Robin Cook, the foreign secretary.

In his long and not very probing *Channel Four News* interview, Mr Prentice was not asked once about his relationship to the Bahrain dictatorship, nor his parliamentary freebies, nor even about the foreign office's approach to torture of political opponents of the Bahraini regime which, in spite of Colonel Henderson's resignation, still goes on all the time.



"Equipment crisis? Don't come the old soldier with us, General"

IT WAS billed on the *Sunday Times*'s front page of 12 December and occupied half of an inside page, complete with elaborate graphics. Yes, the exclusive "anatomy of a random murder" was quite a scoop.

Written by one Nick Martin-Clark, who was identified as a "researcher" working for Jeremy Corbyn MP, the article named the "dial-a-Catholic killer" allegedly responsible for murdering taxi-driver Michael McGoldrick in July 1996.

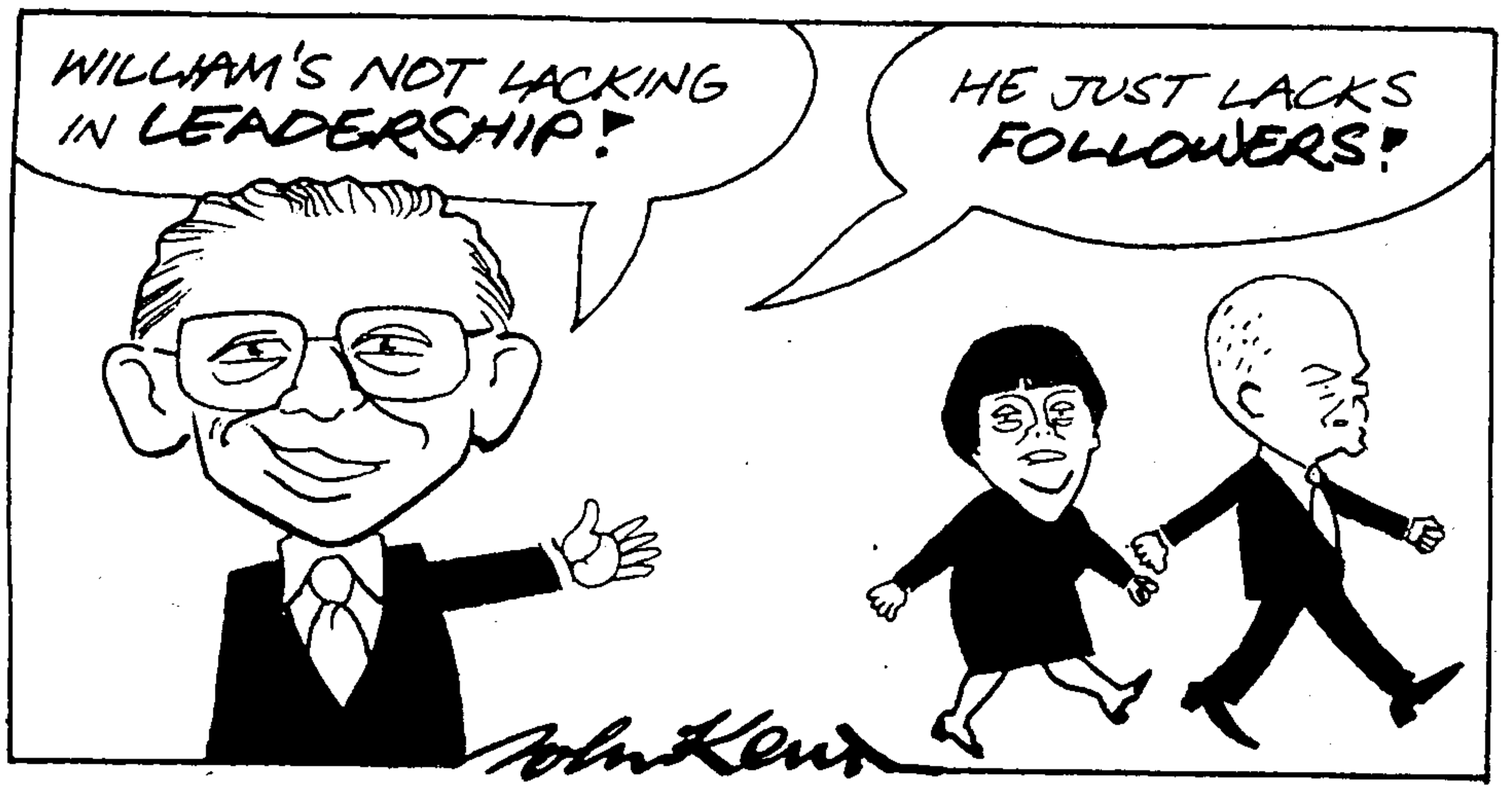
The article concluded with the words "Nick Martin-Clark has relocated for security reasons", implying that the "researcher" was now at risk of death for exposing the perpetrator of this terrible crime. But there turned out to be a better reason for relocating: his claims were false.

Nobody was better placed to know this than Jeremy Corbyn, because Martin-Clark isn't his researcher at all, and he'd never been told about the alleged confession. Corbyn issued a statement pointing this out. At Wapping an urgent investigation got under way, hampered by the fact that Martin-Clark had, er, relocated. The paper therefore decided to ignore the subject in its 19 December edition.

As Wapping hacks desperately asked around if anyone had heard of a Nick Martin-Clark lately, it was eventually – and reluctantly – decided to accept Corbyn's denial. But the resulting correction was slightly less prominent than the original story. It appeared on Boxing Day, tucked away at the bottom of page 5: "Jeremy Corbyn MP points out that he was not informed of the confession... to the murder of taxi-driver Michael McGoldrick. Nick Martin-Clark, who visited [the alleged killer], was not employed by Corbyn."

No further explanation has been forthcoming.

'Backbiter'



NOOKS and CORNERS

OFFICIAL SECRETS

TWO months after his controversial decision not to prosecute self-confessed traitor Melita Norwood for passing nuclear secrets to the Russians, attorney-general Lord Williams has finally dumped the ludicrous official secrets act case against author Tony Geraghty (*Eyes passim*).

For more than a year Geraghty faced the possibility of an Old Bailey trial and two years in jail for revealing in his book on Northern Ireland that – surprise, surprise – the security forces use sophisticated computers to track suspected terrorists.

By appearing not too hasty in overturning his predecessor John Morris's decision to prosecute, Lord Williams may have been trying to avoid embarrassing his colleague. Or perhaps Williams was galvanised by damaging articles in US newspapers like the *New York Times* which compared the government's handling of the Geraghty case to that of the authoritarian regimes of China and Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore.

Either way the decision has not come a moment too soon given the government's willingness to bow to *Modplod*, the ministry of defence police, and its attempt at censorship.

Bizarrely Lord Williams has not yet dropped similar charges against Geraghty's co-accused, former army colonel Nigel Wylde, even though they too stand no chance of securing a conviction and will prove equally embarrassing for the government. (In opposition Labour fought the draconian secrecy legalisation it is now seeking to employ against Wylde).

Although the evidence of alleged damage to security was the same against both men (ie non existent), Geraghty was charged under section five of the act, designed to silence journalists, and Wylde was charged under the all-embracing section two, which will almost certainly become obsolete when the human rights act guaranteeing the right to a fair trial comes into force later this year.

Smart money suggests it is only a matter of time before Lord Williams is forced to drop the daft case against Wylde too.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

GIVEN Turkey's appalling human rights and justice record, why is the European Union (EU) in such a hurry to admit it into the Brussels fold?

Turkish prime minister Bulent Ecevit emerged triumphant from the recent European summit in Helsinki, beaming wildly at the news that his country at last had an invitation to the party, and telling TV viewers "We can achieve our targets on democracy and human rights in a few months." Er... well, it may take a little longer if a recent rash of news items is anything to go by.

First came a report on prosecutions against minors in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir, the centre of the Kurdish insurgency. Over the last nine years state security courts have sentenced 49 children to death. In the same period 51 children aged between 11 and 14 received standard three-year, nine-month sentences for "helping and sheltering the PKK", the Kurdish nationalist guerrillas.

As the report emerged, a court in Izmir was sentencing three youths, aged 20, 17 and 16, to prison terms totalling 77 years for stealing 400,000 Turkish lira – about 50p – and two t-shirts.

Also came the news of Seyda Gergin, a singer with a leftist rock band. She accused police of having dragged her to an empty lot where they had tortured and raped her.

"This is a known method of interrogation," said IHD (Turkish Human Rights Association) official Eren Keskin.

This is all curiously at odds with the picture of a justice system on the verge of harmonisation with Europe, or indeed on the verge of harmonisation with the numerous EU and United Nations conventions Turkey has signed against torture, the prosecution of minors and in favour of political freedoms.

So why the rush to bring Turkey alongside? No doubt the decision of Tony Blair to guarantee the £200m Ilisu dam project near Diyarbakir (see last *Eye*) – even though 20,000 Kurds will lose their homes because of it – is entirely coincidental. As was the arrival in Ankara of German defence minister Rudolf Scharping, pursuing a DM 14bn order for German Leopard II tanks, and hinting that yes, maybe it was time Germany abandoned its embargo against arms sales to Turkey – brought in, he reminded hacks, because of those pesky Kurds.

NOTHING like beginning the new millennium with a clean slate, especially as "new" Labour has so little use for the past — whether cultural, institutional or material.

This seems to be the policy now being pursued by the government in Scotland: not content with having an excitingly new and incomprehensible design for the new parliament building in Edinburgh designed by a modish Catalan, Enric Miralles, it is now considering sweeping away its tiresome old neighbour at the bottom of the Royal Mile.

I discussed the government's ill-considered proposals for Queensberry House in Eye 981. At that stage it was intended to repair and adapt that much abused town house remodelled by James Smith in the 17th century and make it into a sort of historic vestibule to the adjacent new parliament building next to Holyrood Palace designed by Miralles. Originally, in 1997, the experienced Edinburgh firm of Simpson & Brown had been commissioned to carry out a feasibility study into restoring Queensberry House and it estimated that the cost of repairing the listed building and fitting out the interior in a dignified manner would be in the region of £7m. This, however, was far too much for the government, which entrusted the listed building not to qualified conservation architects but to Mr Miralles and his cohorts, Messrs RMJM, architects — neither of whom has any experience of dealing with historic buildings.

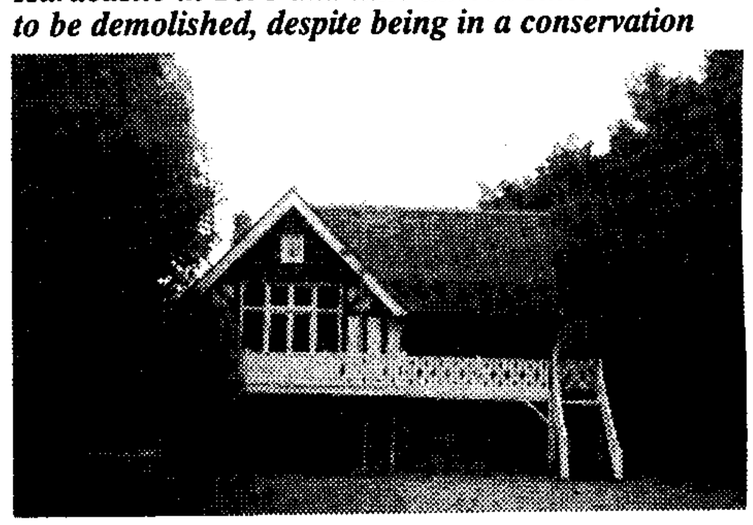
Last month it emerged that the cost of restoring Queensberry House has risen from the cut-price estimate of £3.7m to some £8m because its structural condition has been found to be worse than expected (a contingency Simpson & Brown allowed for). This does not seem much compared with the present cost of Mr Miralles' masterpiece — now £120 million, and rising — let alone with the cost of the temporary plastic dome in London, but it seems it is too much for Dr John Gibbons, chief architect to the Scottish Executive and the éminence grise behind the very limited competition which gave Mr Miralles his chance to strut on an international stage.

And now "sources close to the project" report that Mr Miralles himself would like to clear away Queensberry House and build on the site himself. "Enric has never seen it as a particularly fine building," reveals his suave mouthpiece, Dr Gibbons. "He was extremely anxious when he saw it and heard some of the costs that were being quoted for what we were doing." Of course he was: like any ambitious architect, he wants all the available public money to go towards building his own, still evolving concept. And, of course, Mr Miralles is perfectly entitled to his own opinion, although it does seem to me a little presumptuous for a Catalan to condemn an historic building which the Cockburn Association, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland and historians of Scottish architecture consider important and interesting.

The consultation document on *The Development of a Policy on Architecture for Scotland* recently issued by the Scottish Executive insists that "Government has an interest in architecture... As well as its own intrinsic value, the built heritage is vital to an understanding of archaeology, history, architecture and building materials. It provides a sense of place and identity and contributes to the diversity of townscape, landscape, ecology and culture... The built heritage is an irreplaceable part of national heritage that government has a responsibility to conserve for future generations. Our challenge today is to make buildings and a built environment of the same quality and significance as has been achieved in the past. It is a particular challenge where we build adjacent to historic buildings of value..."

Quite so. Spot on. So it does seem unfortunate that this same government cannot afford or be bothered to respect and preserve a fine historic building in one of the most beautiful old cities in the world, dating from a century when Edinburgh was still the seat of an independent Scottish parliament. Or is this just the sort of sentimentality associated with the "forces of conservatism" that Tony Blair and Donald Dewar will extinguish in the thousand-year "new" Labour reich to come?

MY PICTURE shows the boat house of Downing College, Cambridge: a charming and innocuous little building, designed by one Basil Hardcastle in 1895 and little altered since. And it is to be demolished, despite being in a conservation



area and the strong objections of the conservation officer of Cambridge city council.

It will be replaced by a new, larger, modern and much inferior structure designed by David Thurlow which picks up "themes from the boathouse vernacular tradition but using these in a modern way, e.g., with the balustrading and port hole type windows." The only reason for doing this seems to be that it is cheaper than repairing and enlarging the existing (unlisted) building.

Downing College could, I suppose, once be counted among the "forces of conservatism" when it employed Quinlan Terry to design two inept and vulgar modern Classical buildings. But demolishing a decent and picturesque old boathouse is surely not the most intelligent way to enter Blair's Modern Millennium.

'Piloti'

UKIP

MICHAEL HOLMES MEP, leader of the bedraggled UK Independence Party, received a charming Christmas present from his party chairman and fellow MEP, Nigel Farage.

Until now Messrs Holmes and Farage have presented a united front in the UKIP wars, firing off joint solicitors' letters to newspapers and demanding the resignation of their own national executive. But not any more. "Dear Michael," Farage wrote to Holmes on 18 December. "After much heart searching I have now come to the conclusion that I cannot support you any further... I call upon you to resign the leadership; if you cannot or will not listen to my request I shall go public to all the members informing them of my decision."

Plenty of UKIP members agree with Farage's low opinion of Holmes. But their opinion of Farage is even lower – especially since the fiasco of last week, when he went on the *Today* programme to boast that a high-profile Tory MP would shortly defect to his party. Since Farage was due to meet Teresa Gorman for lunch a few hours later, it didn't take much detective work to guess whom he had in mind. Furious and embarrassed, Gorman promptly cancelled the meeting and was obliged to announce that she had no intention of joining UKIP.

Meanwhile the high court action brought by Michael Holmes against UKIP's national executive opened a week before Christmas but was adjourned until later this month. After the hearing on 17 December Holmes found himself in the same pub as Graham Booth, a member of his executive. "You're a prat!" the party leader yelled. "And you always have been!"

Oh, and there's to be an extraordinary general meeting on 22 January, at which all the feuding factions will have the opportunity for a full and frank exchange of insults. One can only hope that the St John's ambulance brigade is on standby.

Ms Widdecombe has said that her desert island choice of book would be a small volume of John Gay's poems or Virgin's *Aeneid*.

The Times

EYE TV

Coked Up (Channel 4)

ALTHOUGH the highly paid executives of television would not want to be compared with street entertainers, the truth is that busking is central to what both of them do. As appalled letters to newspapers from experts routinely point out, most television documentary consists of making a little knowledge go a very long way.

So it was good to see the medium finally tackling a subject on which its expertise is unchallenged. Coked Up — Channel 4's season of programmes about cocaine — was, outside of shows about television itself, a rare example of a factual project on which the people who really know their stuff are inside the industry rather than outside it.

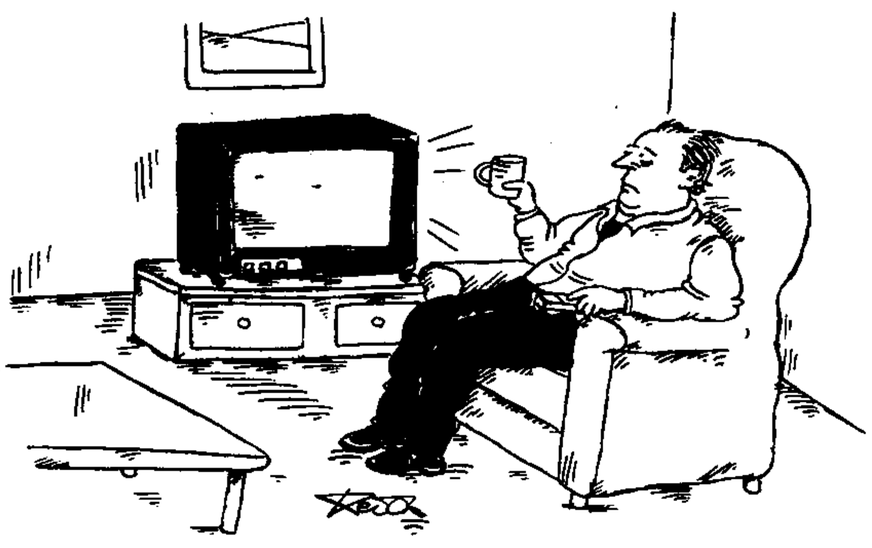
The season, consisting of documentaries with smugly punning titles like My Mate Charlie and Secrets And Lines, was also unusual for another reason. Even supposedly daring young channels like C4 have always been careful not to seem to endorse criminal behaviour. This remains a taboo for executives even as the boundaries of taste are enthusiastically breached.

When ITV's thirtysomething serial Cold Feet tackled the subject of drug abuse, the episode showed only dope-smoking (a deliberate falsification) and there was a lengthy anti-drugs speech, even if it was given to Robert Bathurst's arsehole banker, the least sympathetic character.

It's true that TV sometimes shows contempt for particular laws — most TV films about prostitution are tacitly calling for legalisation — but class A drugs represent an unprecedented challenge to documentary's integrity. No television company making a prostitution doc is concerned about the number of hookers on its pay roll, but many of the industry's big-hitters are known to have a mate called Charlie.

Despite occasional nervous references to the popularity of cocaine in "showbusiness", the films seemed keener to chart the snow storm engulfing the City and other sections of the respectable middle-classes. Even there, however, the series had a problem with illustration.

The obvious model for Coked Up was the numerous recent TV seasons about sex. But whereas sexual exhibitionism is now such an accepted part of culture that even sheep-shaggers will now agree to talk about it on TV, the fact that hard drugs remain a legal taboo if not a social one meant that the only expert witnesses on screen were narcotics cops. All the others were played by actors, prompting hilarious on-screen captions including "Miss Lapp — amateur dealer — played by Carmen Knight" and "Johnny Mohair — High End Dealer".



"The following programme contains strong language and a weak script"

The problem with this technique is that television documentary has generally used disguise to protect brave whistle-blowing witnesses from reprisals. Here, the masking was being employed to allow people to go on using a potentially lethal and ruinous product or exploit others. Call me old-fashioned, but when one of the docs exposed a restaurant which was allegedly largely a front for drug-dealing, shouldn't the name of that establishment be shared with the police rather than colleagues in the industry? Series about football hooligans always hand over their findings to the filth. It is hard to think of another programme which so willingly protected the identity of so many criminals.

But, with any controversial project on a commercial channel, the most intriguing question is which companies will agree to advertise, risking the association of their product with the taboo. In the case of Coked Up, it seemed that ad agencies may, as it were, have been rubbing their noses.

The first commercial break in Secrets And Lines featured a sizeable puff for a Lem Sip product designed to counter runny noses and other schnozzle problems. There was also a lengthy sell for home insurance which might easily be of interest to people who suddenly found themselves with a tendency towards paranoia. Another ad glorified the furniture of MFI. This was a harder joke to crack until you remembered that — apart from paranoia — the main consequence of charlie is a complete loss of judgement.

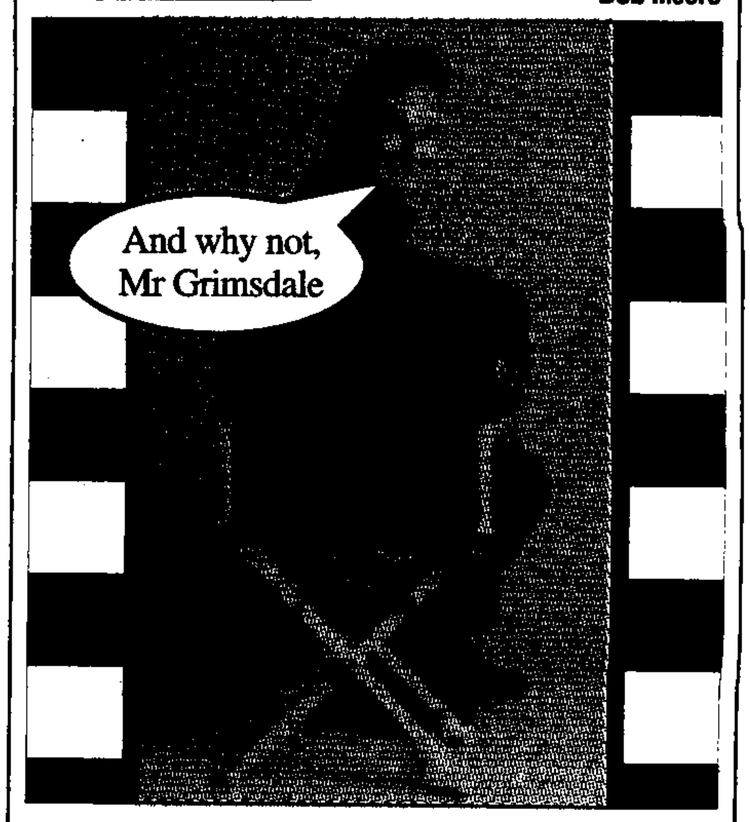
In the second ad break, the connections were even more subtle. But that computer ad featuring Leonard "Mr Spock" Nimoy was a clever little reference to the fact that complete plot summaries of all the episodes of cult TV shows is one of the habits of certain showbiz celebrities when they have been spending a lot of time with Charlie. This was followed by more plugs for products which stop the sniffles. Regrettably, C4's presentation department failed to show the same spirit, being rather cautious, you felt, about which of the channel's other series were trailed during the coke shows.

If only the programme had been as daring as the ads. Long accused of pretending in its documentaries to know more than it really does, television offered in the Coked Up season a disappointing example of programmes which diligently pretended to know less.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Barry Norman Wisdom

MEDIA NEWS

BBC director-general-to-be Greg Dyke's pleas for a few hundred million more (annually) from the licence fee continue to attract scepticism — not least because the money will be blown on digital television.

Leaving aside the question of whether it's right to imprison people for not paying for a TV licence, how many potential viewers really exist for round-the-clock dross like BBC News 24?

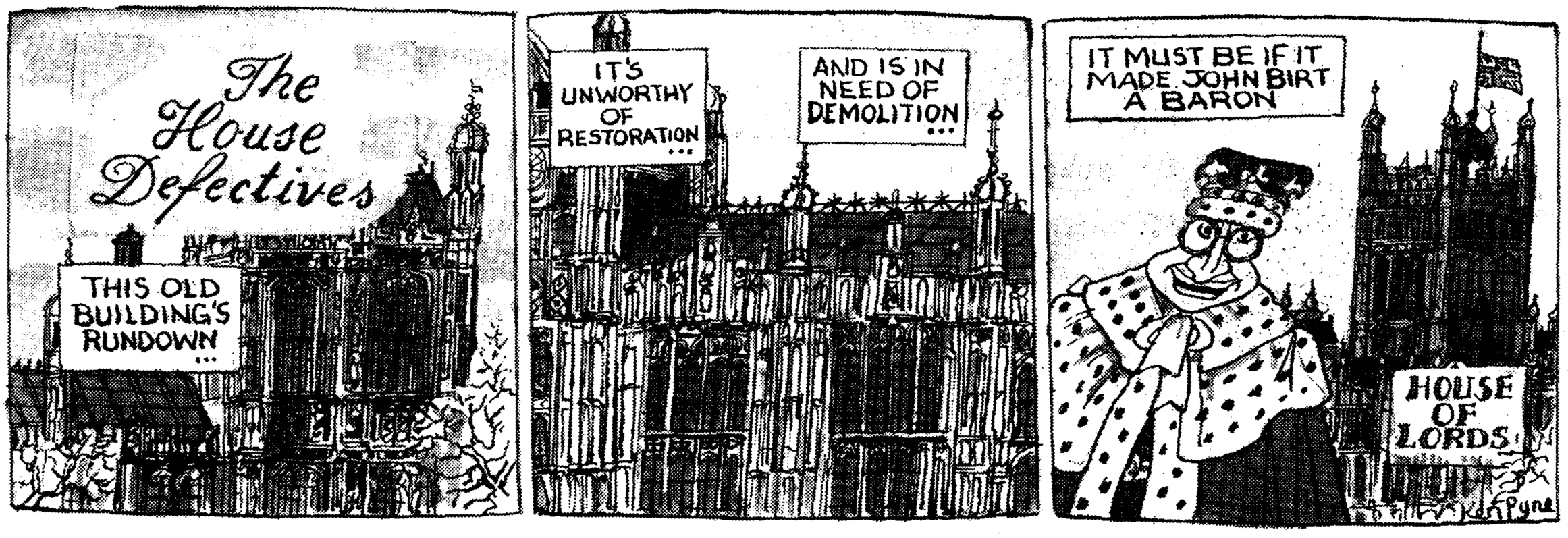
In the TV-obsessed United States, for example, the ratings are in for the typical news month of November. Tragically *Larry King Live*, Cable News Network's highest rated show, and home to distinguished royal sales assistants like Fergie and Prince Michael of Kent, has seen a slight fall in popularity. Around 42 percent of its audience has disappeared leaving it — despite round the clock repeats — with a massive total reach of just 1.03 million viewers. This is pretty good because CNN only had an average of 306,000 daytime viewers last month, and 561,000 in the evening.

Rival services are doing nearly as well. Murdoch's Fox News boasts 115,000 prime-time viewers, and the Bill Gates dominated-MSNBC, 248,000. At the last count the population of the United States was around 275 million.

Allowing for population differences, BBC Choice and News 24 can eventually look forward to ratings the size of a church choir.

THE CHAIRMAN of the Commission for Facial Equality, Sir Herman Ouseley,

Independent


The House Defectives
THIS OLD BUILDING'S RUNDOWN ...
IT'S UNWORTHY OF RESTORATION ...
AND IS IN NEED OF DEMOLITION ...
IT MUST BE IF IT MADE JOHN BIRT A BARON
HOUSE OF LORDS

"BBC ON TOP" runs a remarkable headline in the BBC propaganda sheet *Ariel* over an article about the Christmas Day ratings battle with ITV.

What makes it so remarkable is that it appears at the end of a year when the "on top" channel managed its worst ever ratings performance against ITV... for the second year running.

Undeterred the article includes the following quote from Peter Salmon, BBC1's controller: "As ever Christmas Day was ours, and I am delighted that viewers decided to spend the whole day with us." But they didn't. A quick look at the official BARB figures reveals that during the *peak evening period* a hefty chunk of viewers awoke from stupor and changed channel, ITV managing a 46 percent audience share against the Beeb's 39.7 percent.

BBC insiders are used to this sort of insulation from reality. Take the Beeb's "not for publication" Intranet service. As early as 20 December it was confidently providing mystically-generated viewing figures for Christmas Day – good figures, encouraging figures... wrong figures.

According to the Intranet, for example, ITV's *Coronation St* managed a poor 9.1m on the Big Day. *In reality it* achieved an *EastEnders*-busting 14.7m. Similarly the 8.30pm *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* barely reached a figure of 6.3m in Intranet-land, while topping 12m in the real world. The same show two hours later only managed 6m on the Intranet – 11m for real. Meanwhile BBC productions like *Auntie's Cracking New Bloomers* enjoyed a 33.4 percent audience share in cloud cuckoo land while in fact failing to make it into the most-watched top ten at all.

When the figures get this embarrassing, Salmon likes to argue that he's interested in "range and quality" instead of ratings.

IN THE light of the BBC's recent "Train Week", viewers and listeners may be interested to hear the unexpurgated opinions of Mark Thompson, the corporation's grandly titled director of nations and regions, towards rail safety.

Thompson aired his views during a recent staff meeting at Greater London Radio – which, unhappily for him, was secretly recorded. The main topics on the agenda were the proposed reduction of music on GLR, and Thompson's *Guardian* article criticising the station for playing "pop" music on the day of the Paddington train crash. Also on the panel was Jane Mote, head of London and south-east regions...

GLR staff member: "If you turned on GLR in five years' time, what would you want to hear?"
Jane Mote: "Mark's not going to give you a schedule now because there isn't a schedule."
Mark Thompson: "I could do, I could do."
JM: "No, please! [*Thompson laughs.*] Paddington train crash!"
MT: "YES, lots of train crashes please!" *(MT carries on laughing.)*

Later in the meeting, Thompson returned to the subject.

JM: "I think music is an expression of cultural life in London and therefore it has an important role to play and..."
MT: "I just want to hear about train crashes."
JM: "...and Mark just wants death and gloom."

Thompson seemed to find this all vastly amusing, apparently regarding the Paddington disaster as nothing more than a way of jacking up the ratings for extended news coverage. But he was rather less amused when staff challenged him about the *Grauniad* article in which he revealed that he had "hit the roof" when he heard a pop song on GLR on the morning of the crash.

The song in question, Mambo No 5, was played on Kiss FM at 8.31 that morning and on Capital Radio at 9.01am – but it wasn't played on GLR at all that day, not least because GLR was too busy providing, er, extended coverage of the disaster. It transpired that Thompson is so incompetent he hadn't even tuned his radio to the correct station!

HERE's something to inspire confidence among independent programme makers: plagiarism is now official BBC policy.

The revelation comes in a memo from Will Wyatt, outgoing chief executive of BBC Broadcast, describing the results of a brainstorming session "looking at ideas of how to organise for innovation". From the "numerous creative thoughts" that emerged, there were a few "core themes": share information and expertise, set targets for innovation – and, er, "steal good ideas then develop and adapt them".

Plugged In

1. Crisp firm Bensons is to make a range of snacks featuring cartoon family The Simpsons... The Preston firm has clinched a two-year old deal with 20th Century Fox, makers of the hit TV show. Bensons is embroiled in a 'crisp war' with rivals Walkers.

***The Sun* (prop. R. Murdoch, coincidentally the owner of 20th Century Fox)**

2. Question asked on *National Lottery Red Alert*, which is produced by Ginger Television: "Which DJ gave away a million pounds on his breakfast show on Friday this week?"

The answer? Chris Evans, owner of, er, Ginger Television.

HATTIE BARSBY, "costume coordinator" for the New Millennium Experience Company, had a last-minute change of mind about the absurd costumes the English National Opera musicians who starred at the dome party were forced to wear.

As reported in *Eye* 992, the reluctant musicians, who would have preferred black tie, were made to wear Val Doonican-style grey slacks and cream pullovers. But instead of the natty red boleros originally planned, the orchestra was made to look even sillier in what one member described as "unbelievably tacky" *Star Wars*-style tunics.

Fortunately the TV cameras and the dome guests did not spot that many musicians played in the new millennium with gaping flies. They had never been personally fitted for their costumes, only having been asked to fill out a form stating their measurements. When the costumes arrived late, many of them did not fit. A violinist with a 32in waist and a 33in inside leg, for instance, was issued with trousers having a 30in waist and 35in leg. Safety pins were much in use on the night.

At least the dome's security systems were working well. One musician who put his bag containing a home-made chocolate cake through the airport-style x-ray machine found himself surrounded by anxious security men who examined the cake very closely indeed. It had, he was told, exactly the same density as Semtex.

LUVVIES

"Samantha [Morton] and Rupert [Graves] got some coloured paint," producer Chris Mulburn tells me, "stuck their hands in it and then did hand prints all over the walls of the cottage. They did one wall and then invited me to join in which I didn't think was such a good idea. I spent quite some time explaining to the owner of the cottage that it was a creative thing where actors need to express themselves."

Evening Standard Londoner's Diary

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

LIBEL NEWS

THE one certain beneficiary of David Irving's libel case against Professor Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books is publicity-savvy solicitor Anthony Julius.

"The defence is being led by Richard Rampton QC and Anthony Julius, the solicitor who handled Princess Diana's divorce and the author of a book about the poet T.S. Eliot's anti-semitism," the *Guardian* reported in its preview of the trial last Saturday. There was a further puff for Julius in the next day's *Sunday Times*, which claimed that the case "will be the first big test of his newly acquired skill as an advocate. He has already tried his hand at writing, authoring a book exposing T.S. Eliot's anti-semitism".

You would hardly guess from all this that Julius is merely present as a junior solicitor advocate for Lipstadt. Penguin Books, which is paying most of the defence costs, has its own distinguished solicitors, Sue, Grabbit & Davenport Lyons, and as its junior the far more experienced barrister Heather Rogers, who was George Carman's junior in the Hamilton v. Fayed case and is certainly second in the pecking order behind Richard Rampton QC, who represents both Lipstadt and Penguin. In spite of all the publicity for his book about T.S. Eliot, his Diana connection, etc, Julius's contribution as an advocate is expected to be non-existent.

RAQUEL WELCH FLIES IN

JUST FANCY THAT!

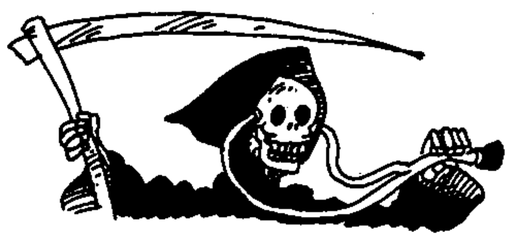
PLOUGH Publishing, which publishes Tolstoy's collection of short stories, *Walk in the Light*, recently received a phone call from a producer at US radio station Radio Denver asking if they could set up an interview with Mr Tolstoy.

"You guys' books are *sooo* contemporary," she cooed, before the sympathetic agent on the other end of the phone gently broke the news to her that Tolstoy died in 1910, a broken man of 82.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

THAT MILLENNIUM BUG WAS JUST AN UNMITIGATED DISASTER FOR ME, QUIN
I'M SURPRISED, JEZ. IT REALLY DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE CAUSED MUCH TROUBLE
ARE YOU KIDDING?! THE DELI'S COMPUTERISED BAKING SYSTEM CRASHED!
SALE
NO WALNUT CIABATTA UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
FINNISH CROCUS BREAD
ALGERIAN CHICK PEA BAPS
DUFFER



DOING THE ROUNDS

Letter of the Millennium

Dear M.D.

My son is a senior house officer in Whipps Cross Hospital, Leytonstone, in north-east London and was on duty, just one of several such periods over the holiday, from 9.00am Christmas Day to 11.00am Boxing Day. He, and the other 40 or so doctors on duty were exceptionally busy both with accident and emergency admissions and with numerous very ill patients under their care such that very few had any time for rest, let alone sleep.

The hospital administration, in a spirit of Christmas cheer (and while no doubt themselves enjoying the festive season with their families), closed all canteen facilities for the duration of the holiday, thus depriving the staff of any food whatsoever. Despite, as I understand it, a statutory obligation to provide hot food on a 24-hour basis, this practice is apparently widespread in an attempt to save a few pounds.

Normally the medical staff resort to buying in food themselves from take-away outlets etc, but these were not, of course, available on Christmas Day or Boxing Day and the doctors in this hospital were reduced to the occasional chocolate from patients. I am unsure whether this was this just a consequence of gross managerial incompetence at Whipps Cross or whether it reflects an ill-conceived response to budgetary constraints from on-high and may well have been repeated elsewhere.

Yours faithfully...

Memo of the Millennium

From Jon Winkle, General Medical Council to all GMC Email Users

07 December 1999
Colleagues,

In the "IT Matters" bulletin of October, I reported that we planned to provide Intranet and Internet services to all colleagues by Christmas. Things were progressing well until last week when the special computer we ordered to provide these services was stolen from the delivery van outside our front door. Our supplier is doing his best to source a replacement server but because of the particular type we require, there will be a delay of several weeks.

Animal Hospital

IN *Eye* 987 M.D. exposed the failure of many of the 400 a year spinally injured patients in the UK to receive an injection of Methylprednisolone within eight hours of injury, despite evidence that it can reduce subsequent paralysis by between 22 and 57 percent.

This prompted Sid Sinclair, a resident of Sondrio, northern Italy, to ask his local vet if he used the drug for spinally injured animals. "He's been using it for some years. And thanks to the relatively low cost of the drug, he keeps three ampoules of varying sizes in his medical kit at all times so he can swiftly administer it to such animals."

Not to be out done, Richard Scarlnett, a British vet, contacted the *Eye* to say that British vets have been using the drug "for at least 2 decades". Alas, human Simon Horsfall, who tipped off the *Eye* about this particular scandal, was not even offered Methylprednisolone when he broke his back at work in June 1995. If only he'd been born a dog.

Care of the Elderly

COMPLAINTS from patients and relatives at the Cheltenham General and Gloucestershire Royal Hospitals in 1999 have been published by the local community health council.

The report claims that there were not enough nurses on the wards, and that the few who were "placed the food out of patients' reach and failed to help them eat, gave no explanations when placing patients on mixed sex wards, failed to explain delays and showed a lack of concern for patients after operations."

A spokesman for the Royal College of Nursing described the report as "not very productive" and added: "The types of complaints listed in the report are made routinely." So that's all right, then.

Just another winter...

SO far this millennium the number of available (ie empty and staffed) intensive care beds in England's 1,500 hospitals has ranged from 0 (nought) to 11. Hospitals in Swansea closed to emergency admissions having taken "120 emergencies beyond our capacity".

Bath's Royal United hospital had 56 medical emergency admission on new year's day alone. And London's Northwick Park Hospital had to use a St John's Ambulance bus to cope with overflow patients from accident and emergency. Thank God there isn't a flu epidemic...

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

The Strategic Rail Authority

INSTEAD of keeping its promise to renationalise the railways, Labour is fobbing off the electorate with something called the shadow strategic rail authority (SSRA).

In theory the lethargic rail authority should restore a sense of overall direction for the rail network. In practice it is following a wishy-washy Blairite agenda of pretending that private business is motivated not just by money but by social and environmental goals.

The need for a strategic body has been obvious since the passenger railway was handed to an assortment of private franchisees (mostly bus operators), who have been too busy engineering their own ticketing scams, garish paint jobs and short-term profits to consider the future of the rail network as a whole.

The SSRA (formed last summer by merging the franchise office Opraf and dormant British Rail board) has acknowledged that most of the franchises must be renegotiated soon to get them out of their present rut. Most franchisees have demonstrated little strategic thought, so the SSRA has devised a grand plan — asking them, ahem, what they would like to do.

SSRA chairman Sir Alastair Morton has spent the last few months making astrologically vague suggestions about what might impress him when he examines the new franchise bids. "I look to those both inside and outside the rail industry to meet our challenge head on and to come up with innovative plans," said Mystic Morton last month. So much for leading from the front.

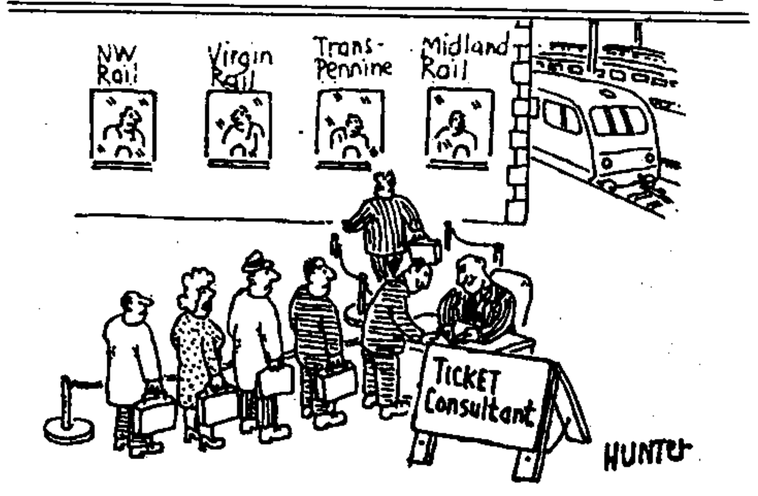
Two things can be divined from Morton's speeches, however: there will be fewer franchises (probably) and some of the new ones won't follow the same boundaries as the present ones (possibly). The SSRA has invited private companies to draw their own rail maps of the future, using 15 franchise areas now up for grabs in any shape or form. The best entries will win a set of crayons (*shurely "the chance to make untold profits and personal fortunes for the next 20 years"? Ed*).

Three further franchises have been selected for fast-tracking in the original way, through bids for specific operations. But two of them — now in the hands of Connex South Central and Chiltern Railways — are ones which bidders for the group of 15 might want to incorporate in their bids because of potential synergy and economies of scale.

The shortlist for the fast-track franchises makes depressing reading for passengers. As if the bus firms already running trains (eg Stagecoach and FirstGroup) had not demonstrated their lack of flair on both the roads and railways, the SSRA has let yet another, Arriva, get a foot in the door as one of three contenders for Chiltern. Bizarrely Connex is still in the running for South Central, even though it has already been rejected once for an extended franchise and even though its grimy trains bear daily witness to the quality of its management.

For the King's Cross to Edinburgh mainline the SSRA has a choice between the red devil Virgin — which has instituted diabolical fares increases on its current franchises while punctuality has gone to hell — and the deep blue Sea Containers (involved and broken promises by its GNER subsidiary — *Eye* 968). Incidentally Virgin pulled the plug on all its train services in the early evening of new year's eve to avoid paying staff extra for working on millennium night (a time of heavy demand for travel). But the explanation to travellers in its magazine was novel: "Where were you at the end of century? So nobody answers 'on a train somewhere between Stafford and Crewe', Virgin Trains has revised its festive schedule for the millennium period."

'Dr B. Ching'



DOWN ON THE FARM

ONE of the more heart-warming features of this government is that it believes in being nice to animals. Cuddly little foxes. Sweet furry little minks. That sort of thing. But when will animal rights activists wake up to the implications of the intervention board's recent decision to squeeze down still further the number of abattoirs licensed to take part in the government's so-called "over 30-month scheme"?

One cannot blame "new" Labour for the fact that we have wasted upwards of £5bn of taxpayers' money on this obscene and fatuous scheme, which has so far involved the pointless incineration of several million cattle just because they happen to be more than two and a half years old. The mass-slaughter policy was originally dreamed up by the NFU and the supermarkets at the height of the 1996 BSE hysteria as a means of "restoring consumer confidence". It was seized on by a panicking Douglas Hogg, the then Tory agriculture minister, in the hope of kidding Brussels that he had everything under control. Since then Labour ministers have merely carried on the good work "Piggy" set in train.

What the present lot can wholly be blamed for, however, was last month's decision to limit the number of firms "licensed to kill" under the OTMS to just 21. This has left farmers in large parts of Britain anything up to 150 miles from their nearest approved abattoir; and the animal welfare implications are horrendous. What it means is that, to get their animals to the nearest slaughterhouse on the ministry list, the farmers may now have to see their old cows crammed into lorries to endure journeys lasting several hours, often in appalling conditions.

Thanks to the bizarre geographical distribution of these abattoirs, any dairy farmer in East Anglia wishing to get rid of his cows no longer has any choice but to have them trucked either down to Ashford in Kent, or over to Chesterfield in Derbyshire. There is no longer a single OTMS-approved abattoir in Devon, where there are still a large number of small dairy farms. Until December one local abattoir, West Devon Meats, had been handling up to 2,000 over-30 months cattle a week. But Devon farmers must now arrange for their animals to be transported either to Penzance at the far end of Cornwall, or up to Somerset, involving journeys of 100 miles or more.

"These cattle have been in the care of the same farmers for years," says one East Anglian haulier, Kenny Warne. "They don't want to see them messed about when it comes to culling. They want them taken to an abattoir as near as possible, and slaughtered as quickly and painlessly as possible." But that is no concern of the officials of the intervention board, who decided on the drastic reduction in the number of abattoirs on their list to "cut down on costs". Nor of course are they concerned that farmers are now having to shell out much more to pay for the longer journeys than the officials will be saving the taxpayers.

Nevertheless the most horrifying aspect of the 30-month scheme remains the fact that, scientifically, it is totally unnecessary. No scientist has ever recommended that all these healthy animals should be burned to ashes and dumped in landfill sites. The number being killed under the 30-month scheme is still running at more than 800,000 a year: at a total cost so far averaging more than £200 for every taxpayer in the country.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TENNIS BALLS

AS AUDITORS announced an investigation into how a £1m film project for Durham's millennium celebrations came to be awarded to Brendan Quayle, tennis chum of city council chief executive Colin Shearsmith, without being put out to tender (*Eye* 991), the council's press office issued a hurt statement in defence of their boss.

"Colin Shearsmith and Dr Quayle have a purely professional relationship," it said. "Occasional tennis matches were played well over two years ago between a group of 12 businessmen, two of whom were Colin Shearsmith and Dr Quayle." Which begs the question of who the other 10 "businessmen" in the tennis set were. One was local Labour MP Gerry Steinberg; others included prominent local solicitors, a chartered surveyor and a high-ranking police officer.

A confidential report from Shearsmith to councillors reveals that delays in starting Durham's grandiose millennium city and Walkergate schemes have already cost the city £421,000, plus a further £140,000 a month in penalty payments to developers. One reason work is not underway is that no alcohol licence has yet been granted for the huge nightclub at the heart of the Walkergate scheme, which is being opposed by police and residents who fear that attracting thousands more drinkers will only exacerbate Durham's severe problems of boozing and brawling.

Meanwhile councillors are getting to grips with the district auditor's annual "management letter" to members which reveals that the council's cash reserves have declined from £6m in 1995 to £500,000 now. "The situation," warns the auditor flatly, "is now critical." In other words, Durham city council, on the brink of embarking on some £100m worth of "regeneration" developments, is in danger of going bust. Anyone for tennis?

DEADLY SILENCE

MICHAEL ABRAM, the paranoid psychotic accused of stabbing ex-Beatle George Harrison, was well known to social workers in Knowsley, Merseyside, for his frequent threats to throw himself off tower blocks.

Locals are amazed that this very disturbed individual wasn't sectioned under the mental health act long ago. Alas Abram's case is not the first of its kind in Knowsley. In February 1996 Leo Gavin, 36, a schizophrenic, stabbed to death schoolboy Lee Kinch, 14.

Harrison's attacker Abram lived in a flat in "awful" Woolfall Heights, which when raided by police was found to be without wallpaper or carpets. Gavin had lived in similarly squalid conditions in a derelict building on St John's Estate, also in Huyton, and was also well known to social services. After Lee Kinch's death locals wanted to know why the council had apparently failed to do anything to help Gavin, who was obviously mentally ill and a danger to the public. The case was particularly embarrassing because the killer's local councillor was Knowsley's Labour leader, Jim Keight (see *Eyes passim*).

The council promised a full inquiry into the affair. When its report was presented to the council leader and chief officers last year they refused to make it public. Why?

PS: Jeremy Ambache, director of social services, announced his departure last week for a similar post in the London borough of Bromley.

PPS: Knowsley social services' "Creative Forces" partnership has been shortlisted for an award for "the work it has done for people suffering from a range of mental health problems from depression to schizophrenia", the council announced last week. The families of Lee Kinch, Michael Abram and Leo Gavin are not impressed.

● OUR old friend Howard Knight, Labour's local government supremo, has been on the phone to northwest regional office again following the *Eye*'s account in issue 992 of how Francis Williams, the West Lancashire party auditor who brought to light financial irregularities last year, was shafted in his bid to become a candidate for the district council elections in May. Following "advice" from Knight, all candidate selection meetings have been suspended until further notice.

SITUATION VACANT

ADS FOR the post of "managing director" of Hackney council leave job seekers in no doubt about the tough task they face. Applicants are invited to name their own salary, before being warned that Hackney has "an absence of coherent political leadership". One person who has made it clear she will not be applying is the current acting MD, Sarah Ebanja.

A report to be published this month by the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA), states that the council is on the verge of collapse and warns that this is the last chance to put things right before the government steps in and closes the show down.

Whoever takes over could do worse than start by tackling the problems that beset the pisspoor core finance department, which between November 1998 and February 1999 failed to produce a single financial report for councillors. Standard practice is for monthly reports. When a report finally surfaced it was based on figures which were four months out of date. And when individual departments' spending figures were eventually transferred to the corporate database, the transfer of information had a 50 percent error rate. So no one had any idea of the true state of the council's finances, or whether it was being defrauded.

BROWN STUDY

AGRICULTURE minister Nick Brown doesn't have a lot of farms in his Newcastle East constituency, so it is a pity that one of the few there poses a threat of lead poisoning to local children — a fact long ignored by the leisure department of Newcastle city council which has funded Byker city farm to the tune of £50,000 per annum since 1992.

In that year an environmental studies student at Newcastle Poly (now the University of Northumbria) found lead levels in the soil on the former lead works to be nearly seven times the legal limit allowed for housing development. The charitable trust which runs the farm, visited by thousands of inner-city kids every year, disputes the results. But last year the health and safety executive tested the soil and concluded that vegetables grown there were unfit for human consumption. Rather than move to an uncontaminated site, the trust decided that vegetables grown in the polluted soil would be used purely for show. City Farm's project manager Jan Pyrke says she is happy for her own 11-year-old daughter to visit the farm. Environmental campaigners, on the other hand, are pressing the council to admit that exposing youngsters to such high levels of lead is not acceptable under any circumstances.

PARK LIFE

ROBBIE STOAKES, director of leisure and community services for Bromley council, has his spiel off pat. "A clean, green and safe environment is... a major aspiration for most people," he told a "study day" on London's public spaces at the Museum of London before Christmas. "I don't think we should discount the recreational value of green space."

How very true. "Certain commercial developments", however, such as Bromley's plans for Crystal Palace park, including "restaurants... [and] viewing areas to see right across London and the park" could only enhance the environment. Alas Stoakes forgot to mention that the best views would be had from the 950-space rooftop car park above the 4,800-seat, 20-screen cinema complex that is the heart of the Crystal Palace development and which will obliterate more than 12 acres of "clean, green" parkland beneath clean, grey concrete.

Pseuds Corner

Policy and Practices Research Group

Valerie Hey and Angela Creese of the Institute of Education will be giving a paper on

Hegemonic, traditional and reflexive discourses of emergent masculinities: contextualising gender and class identification in different pedagogic practices.

Poster, King's College, London School of Education

This festive season, Katie Neil, a 28-year-old producer, is involved in a thoroughly post-feminist project. "Six of my girlfriends have a bet to get a shag by Christmas Eve. It's liberating to think of sex as a question of pride and challenge rather than a personal issue..."

Guardian

When I've said there will never be an entertainment show as successful as *House Party*, it was an observation on the breadth of things that come out of the show. No television programme has created theme parks, or a character, like Mr Blobby.

NOEL EDMONDS
Independent

I like things simple and neat, so we wrapped the present in white tracing paper, then covered it with Cellophane, with rose petals between the layers. We finished it off with a grey and black ribbon and fresh flowers. It's lovely to use fresh flowers on presents; it's a bit more romantic than just tying a big bow.

NIKKI TIBBLES
Sunday Times Style Section

"Jimmy Clitheroe's Penis"

Christmas lights and
poncy baubles,
cannot make a sparrow warble.
You cunt, you shit, you
pig from hell,
you leech,
you ghoul,
you fantasy vaudeville.

DAMIEN HIRST
(from "Oral: poems, sonnets, lyrics and the like")

Winter Beach Cafe

The contemporary equivalent of a soirée – poems, songs, deep conversations, presentations, inspirational table settings and digital projections, accompanied by good food and wine. Special guests will introduce themes: untying knots, identifying bad seeds, dumping debris, violence within, new vistas, ecology and shopping.

Flyer advertising millennium events at Welfare International centre

65 different walks of life.

Camper is not a shoe, it is not about design, and it is not about style because you are different than your

neighbour, than your cousin, than your psychiatrist. Camper stands for freedom of choice, of doubt, freedom to absolutely want all of them or none. At Camper, to be different is an inalienable right. For that reason, here you will find 65 different ways of feeling, living and walking.

65 shoes in search of a story: your story.

Camper shoe manufacturer's website

CONTRIBUTORS: Claudine McCreadie, Celia Brayling, Francis Rathbone, S. Barlow, Christopher Hart, H.D. Lively, Humphrey Serjeantson.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Private Eye

Glittering Prize Letter

Sir,

With reference to your recent revelations concerning myself, Mandy Allwood and Gary Glitter — now there's a motley crew for you — I would make the following observations. Claims that I misrepresented Mandy and Paul, or "Bonnie and Clit" as they became known to my staff, first appeared in the summer of 97 in the Sun. If legal action by the "charming people" is still pending it could possibly have something to do with their solicitors who, having studied all the invoices, accounts and contracts, presumably decided there was no case to answer. Interestingly enough, what emerged from a close inspection of all business transactions, was that "B & C" actually owed my company several thousand pounds in commission.

With regard to the German TV company that supposedly offered £250,0000 for world rights, these claims came from information supplied from a freelance assistant cameraman who was aware of something that neither I, nor the Managing Director, nor the British Agent for ProSieben, the German TV Company, had ever heard of – possibly because no such offer existed. "B & C" were aware at all times of all contracts undertaken by me, and accounts for all transactions were supplied to them and their solicitors in August 1997.

I can also reveal exclusively to you — and for absolutely no fee — that "B & C" were never charged PR fees for my help and advice with the various county court judgments and claims made against them by an ever increasing number of creditors who were keen to publicise activities of "B & C". These creditors included Tesco's, Marks and Spencers and various hotels and garages visited by our heroes. For the record, I had long ceased to be involved when "B & C" tried to sell a house in Wimbledon village that they didn't own, and Mandy Allwood got herself involved in the mortgage fraud investigation that she was convicted of last year.

Turning to another charmer, Gary Glitter, both myself and Allison Brown are highly delighted with our results concerning this sweet, giving pop icon. Our aim was to warn the British public of the activities of this "baldy perv", and in spite of the judge I don't think there is any doubt we succeeded. Allison's story, together with accounts from various other victims of his "kindness", meant the British public in general and particularly parents of young children have seen him in his full glory. And in doing this Allison and myself have made lots of money from the media which I'm sure you will be very happy about.

So far from "nursing my wounds" and my reputation as the "supreme media fixer being damaged", I am extremely happy with the reality of MCA's role with both "B & C" and "BP".

Kind regards,
MAX CLIFFORD,

c/o Gary Glitter Child Support Agency, Havana, Cuba.

Cheek by Jowell

Sir,

Can I correct your piece on three counts (HP Sauce, Eye 992):

The constituency I represent is Dulwich & West Norwood, not Dulwich.

You state that Ken Livingstone never held "any responsibility for the affairs of Lambeth". In fact he was a Lambeth councillor for SEVEN years including two as vice-chair of housing.

I do not think that anyone who knew me would describe me as a "leftwinger", fashionable though that was at the time.

Happy Christmas and all best wishes for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,
RT. HON. TESSA JOWELL MP,

House of Commons.

Painter portrait

Sir,

Unfortunately the facts don't support your prejudice about Richard Painter (Eye 992). I have been a member of the Executive Board (Governors) of ADT College in Wandsworth for the past seven and a half years (six of them as an elected parent representative). Mr Painter, the Chief Executive of the school, regularly displays very high qualities as an "education administrator" and with the very able teaching staff, is due credit for ADT College regularly coming top of the state funded schools in the borough in the annual league tables. Would that all our schools had the likes of Mr Painter at the head.

RON EMLER,

Via e-mail.

Peter's friend

Sir,

I was disturbed by your recent piece. I was very fond of Paul Bowles — he was a long-time friend.

Yours sincerely,
PETER OWEN,

Peter Owen Publishers, London SW5.

Shopping basket case

Sir,

Your Stock Horror report (Eye 991) showing that £100 invested five years ago in Tesco would today have a value of £255 as compared with £98 in the case of Sainsbury's, poses a serious problem for me as a mere customer. Do I shop at Tesco's on the basis of greater efficiency in this area of business, or Sainsbury's in the hope that it may not be ripping me and its suppliers off in the interest of investors, to quite the same extent?

I think we should be told.

Yours faithfully,
BOB HEYS,

Halifax.

Local demockery

Sir,

Sad to see the Eye siding with the control freaks of Downing Street and Whitehall on local government changes. Those changes — it is an abuse of the English language to call them "reforms" — would further consolidate town hall power in even fewer hands. Of the three options:

An elected mayor would concentrate power in one person. But he or she could not do what 50 or 60 councillors do — and even more power would move to the hands of unelected officials.

A city manager, an option wangled into the bill by SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), would hand total control of our town halls to, you've guessed it, virtually unsackable chief executives.

An elected leader and cabinet would, at least, leave significant powers in the hands of a dozen or so experienced councillors. Better than one, worse than 60.

The decline in the quality and probity of local government in this country is directly due to the emasculation of its powers by government, especially under Thatcher and Blair. The Eye should be campaigning to have powers restored to elected local councils and for power to be diffused among as many councillors as practicable. It's called "local democracy"; it's not perfect but far better than anything else on offer.

Yours faithfully,
CLLR BARRY PHELPS,

The Earl's Court Ward,Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

Sir,

In your Christmas issue you wonder why local councillors are so opposed to the idea of elected mayors.

It would give too much power to the largely Tory-controlled local media to destroy good candidates with messy personal histories in favour of clean living machine politicians. There are few useful people who would survive such a process but clean-living nonentities abound.

It would weaken the power of local councillors who for all their faults are in closer touch with local people than an elected mayor could be.

It would reduce the power of national party organisations which for all their faults do keep some of the worst idiots in local government in line.

Yours faithfully,
J.P. LETHBRIDGE,

Ward End, Birmingham.

Big Benn silenced?

Sir,

With reference to spotting differences between Kosovo and Chechnya, here's another:

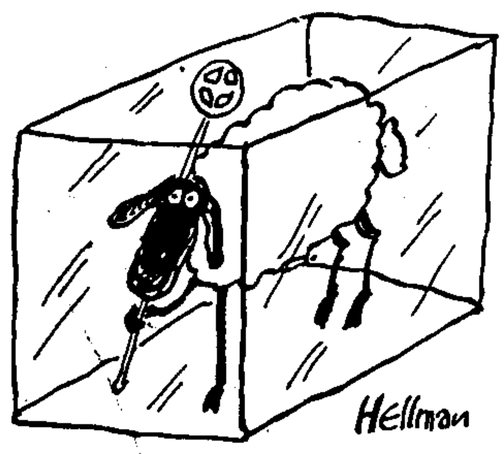
Kosovo: Tony Benn brigade hold anti-NATO rallies, write erudite letters to the Guardian denouncing US foreign policy and greet every NATO mishap with scarcely concealed delight.

Chechnya: Tony Benn brigade say and do nothing.

Yours faithfully,
A. BOWERS,

Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

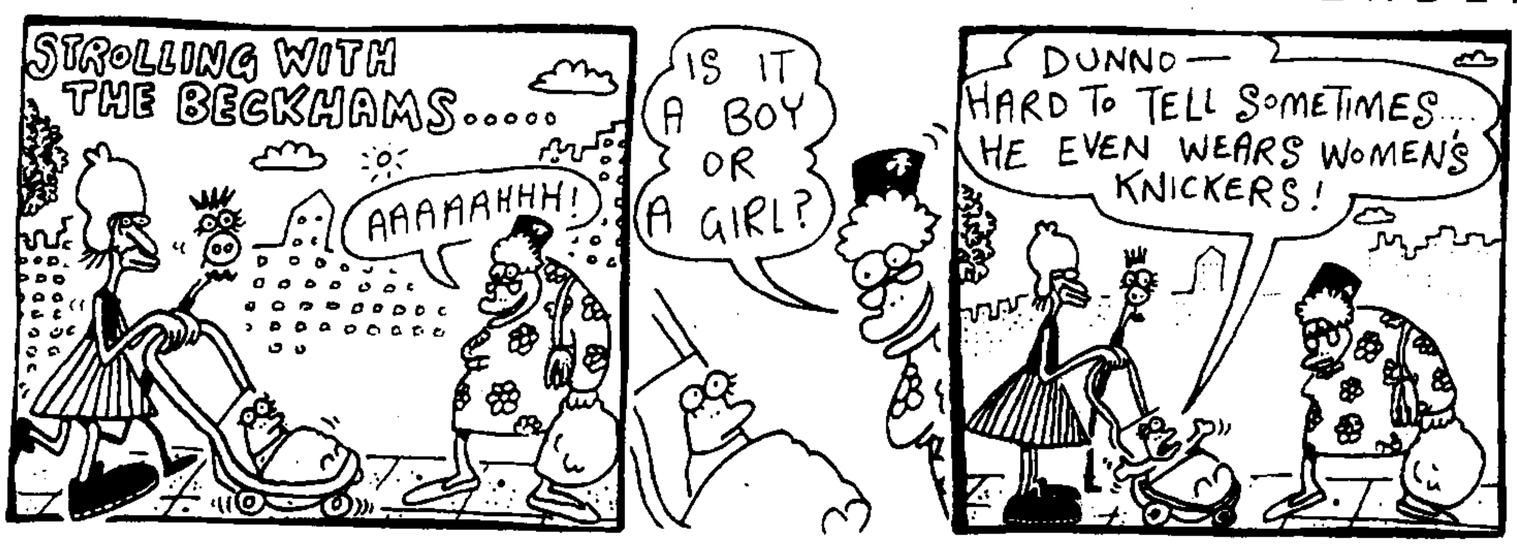
GREY ARIAS



"Agnus Damien"

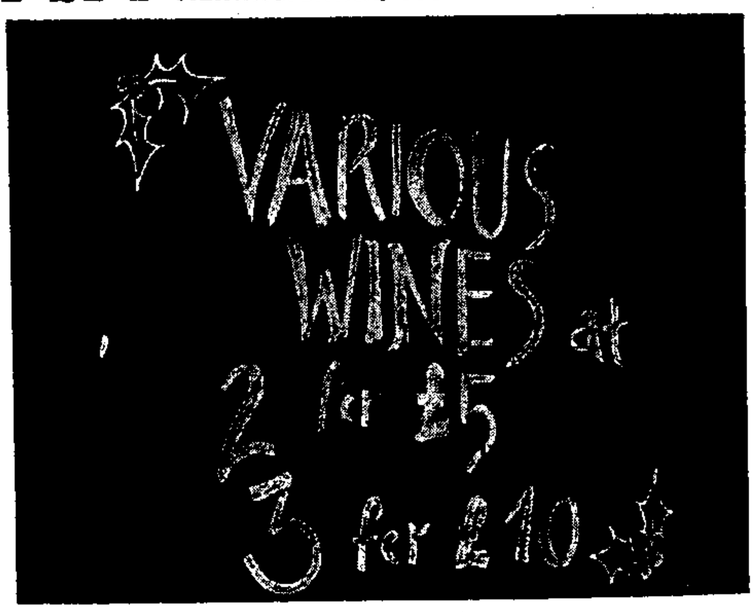
SUPERMODELS

KERBER



ROYAL
CINEMA
ONE GIN (12)
Poetic adaptation of Pushkin's classic verse novel set in 1820's Russia
Leamington Spa Courier

I-SPY *Hammersmith, W6*



Submitted by Clive Coen. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Train of events

Sir,

I read your article on the "savings" to GWT of the Southall accident (Eye 991) and asked: So what?

It matters not a jot whether the ATP or the AWS was working or not. The reason there was an accident was simple and without argument. The driver failed to stop at red lights, a task for which he was both well trained and well paid.

Had the driver of a coach carrying, say, 50 passengers driven through a red traffic light and struck a 38 ton truck resulting in the deaths of a number of his passengers, he would have been rightly charged with causing death by dangerous driving at the least. And there would have been no resultant clamour to fit every vehicle in the country with an automatic system to stop them at every red or amber traffic light.

And the comment on Amey "looking after" Signal 109 at Paddington was equally irrelevant. There has been no question of its operational status – again the driver failed to stop when it was or appeared to be red.

Yours,
M. COHEN,

Via e-mail.

Muck spreading

Sir,

As a committed carnivore and staunch supporter of the British meat industry, I am glad that our vets have the "guts" to enforce the government's hygiene regulations ("Down on the Farm", 10 December).

We find that most abattoirs and meat plants welcome their input, as a key element in the continuous improvement vital to consumer confidence in our meat industry. And all but a handful of operators reject the sexist, anti-foreigner rantings of Dr Muckspreader and his loony friends. Muckspreader claims we under-pay our vets; but if we did, they wouldn't stay. So no, we don't gross £2 million profits per year, or anything like.

The ECJ ruling doesn't do what Muckspreader says, either. Is he always as wrong as this? (Don't write, I think we know the answer...)

Yours,
JASON ALDISS,

Managing Director, Eville & Jones Veterinary Food Hygiene.

Proper Charlie

Sir,

You mentioned Camelot's social and ethical audit in your 10 December edition. I would like to confirm that the audit period was January to December 1999 and the report of the audit will be published on schedule in April 2000. You also mentioned Charlie Leadbeater was being paid as an advisor to Camelot. Can I point out that Charlie has agreed to act as a member of an independent Advisory Panel for Social Responsibility. The role of the panel is to review and agree the methodology used for the audit on the advice of independent auditors, the New Economics Foundation and to sign off the report on the audit. Can I also point out that no member of this panel is receiving any payment from Camelot.

Yours sincerely,
SUE SLIPMAN,

Director Social Responsibility, Camelot Group Plc.

Talking out of his aria

Sir,

With reference to Hellman's "Grey Arias" in Eye 992, I'm afraid that the piece alluded to, "Das Lied von der Erde", is not an opera and so contains no arias. Gustav Mahler's famous symphonic song cycle does contain the words "...fortune was not kind to me in this world!/Where am I going?" So maybe it does have something to do with William Hague after all.

Yours pedantically,
DONALD PATERSON,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Baby

Fayed

Sir,

Have any other readers noticed the remarkable similarity between businessman and fug addict Mohammed Al Fayed and the giant inflatable baby floated over Broadway as part of the New York millennium celebrations? I wonder if this over-inflated duo are by any chance related?

Yours sincerely,
TIM MATTHEWS,

Worcester source

Sir,

Dame Sylvie Krin appears to be under the impression that Rupert Murdoch attended University College. Wrong. He was, of course, a Worcester man like myself. He and Lord Sainsbury are our most famous living alumni, and thanks to their generosity in our recent re-endowment appeal we are now... er... the second poorest college in Oxford.

Yours pedantically,
MARCUS PITCAITHLY,

Perth, Scotland.

Richard & Judy Show

In a moment, we'll be talking about all the latest fashions for baby and how to cheer up those dreary old sausages,
But first, a make-over for mister crocodile!
GODDARD

Snowstorm

Sir,

It is not true that the Inuit have very many words for snow. According to Stephen Pinker "The Language Instinct" (William Morrow & Co/Allen Lane 1994), p. 64 "One dictionary puts the figure at two."

PS: See also G.K. Pullum "The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax" (University of Chicago Press 1991); L. Martin "Eskimo words for snow: a case study in the genesis and decay of an anthropological example": American Anthropologist 88.1986, pp. 418-23. Or on the web: the "Frequently Encountered Errors" page of Prof. Stephen Clark's "Philosophy at Large" site: http://www.liv.ac.uk/Philosophy/fee.html

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN,

University of St Thomas, Houston, Texas.

Pissing down?

Sir,

Waste from aircraft toilets is collected in tanks and later removed by ground-based maintenance vehicles. The "yellow ice" phenomenon reported at Kew, however, could be caused by passengers peeing in the sink. Looking at some of the people who get on charter flights, anything is possible.

Yours sincerely,
ALAN MAGRATH,

Croydon.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Historically, the host nations do well in Euro 2000."
TREVOR BROOKING, Radio 5
(Peter Jones)

"This pilot move by FIFA will take root and fly."
SIR ALEX FERGUSON, BBC1
(D. Chisholm)

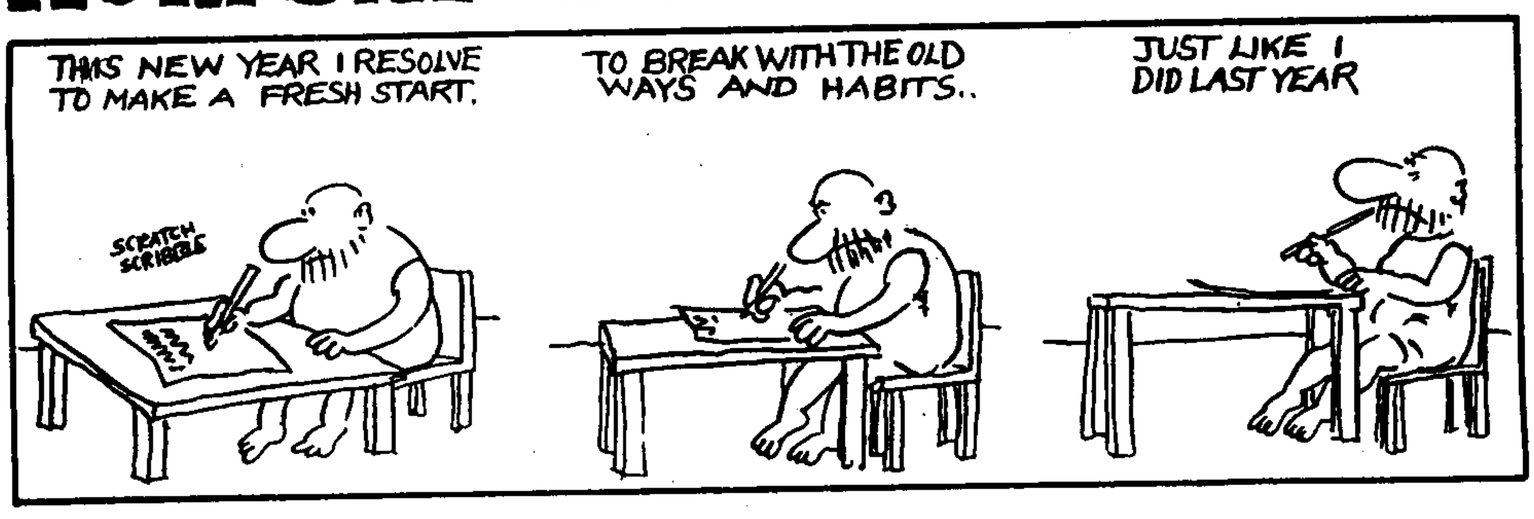
"That was Pele's strength – holding people off with his arm."
RON ATKINSON, ITV
(Peter Duggan)

"There is absolutely no truth in the fact that I am running to be Mayor of Bristol."
TONY ROBINSON, BBC1
(Tim Freeman)

Gaby Roslin: *...and how long will this hour glass last?*
Michael Buerk: *Er... an hour.*
BBC
(M. Fairbrass)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN


THIS NEW YEAR I RESOLVE TO MAKE A FRESH START.
TO BREAK WITH THE OLD WAYS AND HABITS..
JUST LIKE I DID LAST YEAR
SCRATCH SCRIBBLE

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● **"At first, nothing seemed untoward," postmaster Dawie Bester told reporters who had gathered in his post office in East London (South Africa). "I was manning the counter which is used to serve illiterate people when a young man and woman arrived, holding an older man between them. They explained that he was their uncle, and said that 'he is very lazy, he cannot be bothered to stay awake to claim his pension. He may be drunk. He is ill.'**

"I started to become suspicious when I noticed that the old man's eyes were completely closed and still, and I noticed the way that the young man was manoeuvring the old man's hand onto the counter for the fingerprint taking. I told them that pension claimants have to be in full control of their body and mind in order to get the cash, and that I would have to call my supervisor. At that point they shouted a personal remark about my facial tattoo and ran off, leaving the old man to fall to the ground.

"When I got round to the other side of the counter, I discovered that the old man was ice cold, and had obviously been dead for many hours, so I called the police. In all my twenty-nine years working in this post office I have never known such a thing. We have had several people die while waiting in the queue, but never a dead person trying to claim." *(Eastern Province Herald, 23/11/99. Spotter: Paul Maylam)*

—●—

● "My client sustained her injuries while carrying out the tasks she was being paid for," attorney Steven Slootsky told a hearing of Florida's Department of Labour and Employment Security in Fort Lauderdale, "and she is therefore entitled to compensation. She certainly doesn't deserve to be discriminated against just because she worked in the phone sex industry."

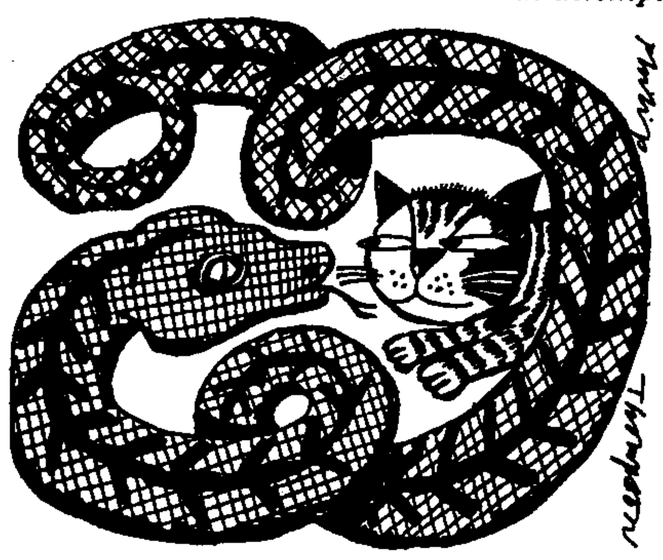
Slootsky was speaking on behalf of his unnamed forty-year-old client during the industrial injuries case she had brought against CFP Enterprises Inc. "My client developed carpal tunnel syndrome, also known as repetitive strain injury, from masturbating as many as thirty-five times a day while speaking with callers. When she started her job, she was told to 'do whatever it takes to keep the person on the phone as long as possible', so she used one hand to answer the telephone, and the other hand to note down her customers' names and fetishes, and to give herself an orgasm during the verbal exchanges. Each call could last up to thirty minutes, and at the end of two years my client had developed carpal tunnel syndrome in both hands. She is therefore claiming compensation of $267 a week from CFP Enterprises, in recognition of lost earnings, and reimbursement of $30,000 in medical bills."

Slootsky later told reporters that his client and CFP Enterprises had agreed an out-of-court settlement. *(Malta Independent, 20/11/99. Spotter: Jamie Pyatt)*

—●—

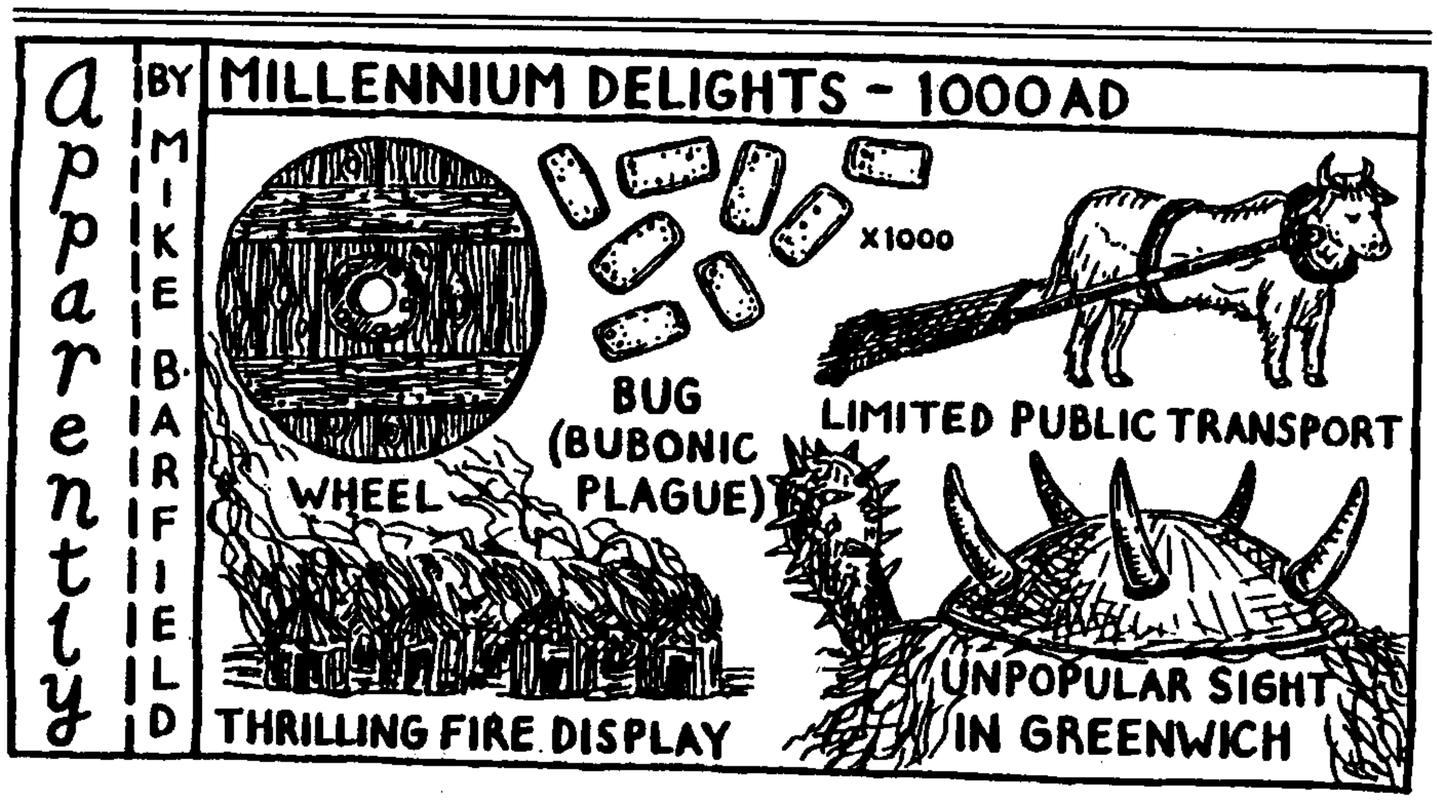
● *"Sir, I am writing to warn your readers of the potential dangers of putting their pets on an overly strict diet. Last month, our vet advised us that Lelu, our six-year-old Burmese python, was becoming obese, and put her on the reptile equivalent of a Weight-Watchers program. Instead of three rats a day, she was to be fed only one.*

Yesterday, as I was getting out of the bath, I heard my wife screaming in terror. I rushed naked into the dining room, to see our four-year-old tabby cat, Sniffles, disappearing head-first down Lelu's throat. Initial attempts



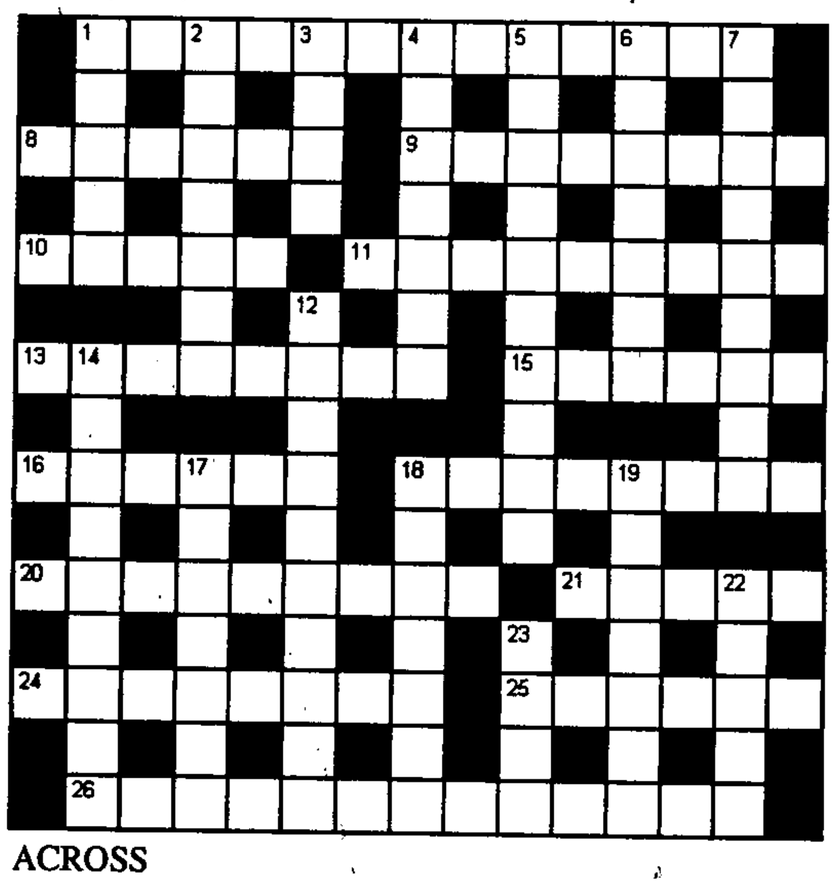
to prise the frantic Sniffles from Lelu's powerful jaws failed, but our screams alerted our neighbours, who burst in armed with spades and rifles, thinking that a crime was taking place. We explained the situation, and after several minutes, we finally managed to free Sniffles, but by that stage our cat was motionless, glassy-eyed, and apparently quite dead.

Luckily, the story ends happily, because as I was digging a grave in the back garden, Sniffles suddenly regained consciousness, and seems to be none the worse for her ordeal, apart from a few bruises and a bit of mild brain damage. But from now on, whatever the vet may say, Lelu can have as many rats as she wants. Yours sincerely, Graham Goodall, Berea, Durban." (South Africa Times, 30/11/99. Spotter: Ray Siff)



EYE CROSSWORD 148

by Cyclops — *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 "The old President gets but one daily" – how rumours get around! (4-9)
8 Warning signals – that they're coming back? (6)
9 State of Dicky: the man's lost his head entertaining Number One (8)
10 Birds getting intercourse (sex) (5)
11 Archer's got front – and lip (6,3)
13 Be the first to show Hague's finally following Blair? (8)
15 Mystic Meg's rude craft: going topless (6)
16 Would-be hooker's view on Right (6)
18 What our Brian would be: able to go round fooling one's sexual partner? (6,2)
20 The product of de-capitalised New Labour? (4-5)
21 Corporately prominent, honoured types taking ecstasy (5)
24 Practice bondage and relax before shower (8)
25 Topless demonstrator? Liar! (6)
26 OK, hussy forced out but is she really entitled to be called this? (7,2,4)

DOWN

1 Reaction on getting wind of cup size on topless movie star (5)
2 Nut-case foreign court into S and M (7)
3 Play with oneself, being shy? (4)
4 Garland on fast in spare time (7)
5 Light-headed trespasser, grand old Italian, gets engaged (10)
6 Not what a retainer suffers from? (7)
7 Hague's first (hey, hey!) to secure vote of the masses (3,6)
12 Degenerate, fashionably nostalgic Michael ... (10)
14 ... to manage half of Blair's offspring degenerate (3,2,4)
17 Nautical mishap – one's lost nuts (7)
18 Intimate second TV series (7)
19 Opera makes Castro-type rise up firm (7)
22 Rolls up, oily and unctuous (5)
23 Flipping Forte admirer's crap (4)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 21.1.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 147

Winner: RON HUNTER

ACROSS 1 Iwo Jima 5/7 ac. Jim Crow 7 (see 5 ac.) 9 Swill 12 MTV 14 Battle of Hastings 15/52 dn. Nazi Party 16 Susan 18 Star Chamber 19 Bon Jovi 20 Haughey 21 First World War 24 Sutch 25 (see 10) 27 Radio One 30 Hitler 32 Ernie 33 Esher 35 Rupert Murdoch 36 Plugs 37 Sarum 40 Acrid 41 AWACS 42 (see 55) 43 (see 68) 46 Kissagram 47 Media 48 (see 78) 49 Basil 50 Groat 52 Pistol 53 Reign of Terror 55/42 Slave Trade 57 Rains 58 Grocer 59 Neurotic 62 Uglify 63 El Tel 64 Mad cow disease 67 Anoraks 69 Ringing 70 Exams 72 Pablo 75 Indie 76 USSR 77 Tolpuddle Martyrs 79 Earth 80 Hess 81 Aitken 82 Wrestlers.

DOWN 1 ICBMs 2 Ostia 3 Illicit 4 Avocado 5 John Bull 6 Miser 7 Climber 8 Organisers 9 Spanish Inquisition 10/25ac/66 Irish Potato Famine 11 Lè Shuttle 12 Mrs Thatcher 13 Vinny 17 Boat People 21 Ford 22 Red Guards 23 Weirdos 25 Press 26 Cromwell 28 Overdraft 29 Not fair 31 Located 34 Cuban missile crisis 37 Slumber 38 Dark Ages 39 Sarajevo 44 Apartheid 45/52 ac. Boston Tea Party 47 Mao Tse-tung 48 Bugle 51 Orange Order 52 (see 15, also 45) 54 GCSE 56 Elizabeth 58 Gallipoli 60 Ross Perot 61 Bonar Law 64 MiG 65 Dresden 66 (see 10) 68/43 South Sea Bubble 71 Somme 73 Boyne 74 Oasis 78/48ac. Pik Botha.

The Grauniad

Beware the Merchants of Dome

The chorus of criticism that has greeted the Dome has come almost entirely from the right-wing papers who will stop at nothing in their attempts to discredit my friend Tony.

Known Tories like Polly Toynbee have led the campaign attempting to make us believe that the Dome is in some way less than a monumental personal triumph for Mr Blair – when a poll of senior Guardian staff (apart from Hugo Young) shows that 100% of us thought it was the finest achievement of this or any other millennium.

And what is the hidden agenda that has prompted these remorseless attacks? I will tell you.

1) Eurosceptic right-wingers, such as Toynbee and Young, see the Dome as a superb opportunity to attack the man whose idea it originally was – ie, Labour Cabinet Minister Michael Heseltine.

2) Old-fashioned homophobes like Young and Toynbee cannot resist laying into the Dome as a way of smearing the openly gay Peter Mandelson.

The Guardian will have no truck with this sinister right-wing conspiracy financed by neo-fascists and... er... totally and utterly... er... playing into the hands of... er... ban fox-hunting now... Vote Labour.

© P. Mandelson, Editor, The Grauniad.
(This piece first appeared in the Mirror.)

EYE STAFF HONOURED!

IT IS with great pride that we can record the names of the Gnome Organisation employees who have been honoured in the New Year's Awards. All too often governments focus their attention on high profile sportsmen and showbiz celebrities, but Mr Blair has sensibly this year chosen to suck up to Lord Gnome, so hats off to the following Gnome employees:

● **Sally Jockstrap (CBE)** For services to sports journalism and in particular her coverage of the 1999 Downhill Snooker Championship.

● **Brigadier Trumper-Smythe (KCGB)** For services to war reporting and in particular his prediction that the bombing of Kosovo would fail utterly.

● **Emmanuel Strobes (OBN)** For loyal service to the Government. *(Surely 'the Gnome Organisation'?)*

● **Phil Space (MBGCKGOBJ)**
(continued p. 94)

STOP PRESS

Dave Spart has turned down the Order of the Garter in protest at the "millions of pounds of sickening waste of public money on the so-called Dome which could have been better spent providing safehouses for abused foxes to protect them from the sickening er... *(That's enough New Year's Honours. Ed. OBE)*

PROPERTY

ROBINSON AND MAXWELL
London's Premier Estate Agents

Luxury apartment available at reasonable price for potential cabinet minister. Close to House of Commons. 3 beds; 2 receptions; kitchen; bathrooms (ample cupboard space for skeletons).

Suit bachelor unable to commit himself to marrying girlfriend called Sarah.

Hurry, hurry, before Peter Mandelson gets there first.

Offers in region of derisory. Apply to Robinson and Maxwell, c/o Andersens plc, Guernsey.

Those Domes – How They Shape Up

Comparison Of A Typical Day Out

by Samuel Taylor Nick Coleridge

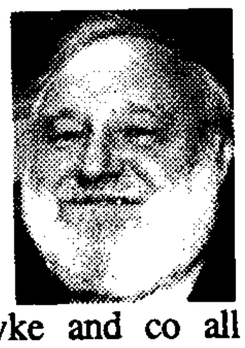
	Pleasure Dome	Millennium Dome
Location	Easy to reach Xanadu	Inaccessible Greenwich
Nearest Transport	Handy for Alph, the sacred river	Hopeless connections to Thames and Jubilee Line
Organiser	Kubla Khan	Jennie Page
Best Feature	"Caverns measureless to man"	Giant pubic lice
Refreshments	Milk of paradise	McDonalds
Reaction of Snellgrove Family from Guildford	"Stately"	"Boring"

Conclusion: *The Eye says "You'd have more family fun at Xanadu"*

A Taxi-Driver writes

Every week a well-known cabbie is asked to give his views on an issue of topical importance.

This week: **Dobbo Dobson** (Camden Cab Co. No. 2713)



BLIMEY, guv, see all those toffs having to queue up in the rain to get into the Dome? You had to laugh, didn't you? Ha ha ha! That Greg Dyke and co all dressed up in their penguin suits having to slum it with the riff-raff? Ha ha ha ha!

No, don't get me wrong, guv! I think it's a scandal, the treatment they got and no offence to all the ordinary people. No I've got a lot of time for the likes of Greg Dyke, that Roland Rat was brilliant. No I'm sorry about what I said earlier. Have this ride on me. Will you give me your vote guv?

I had that Simon Kellner in the back of the cab – blimey, only just squeezed him in!

NEXT WEEK: ***Andy Roberts*** *(Cab No. 9472) on why my mate Jonathan Aitken never done nothing wrong.*

This Year's Names

From The Rev. Jack Nutter

Sir, As is my custom at this time of year, I have made a tally of the most popular names ocurring in the Times Births' Column over the last Millennium. They are as follows:

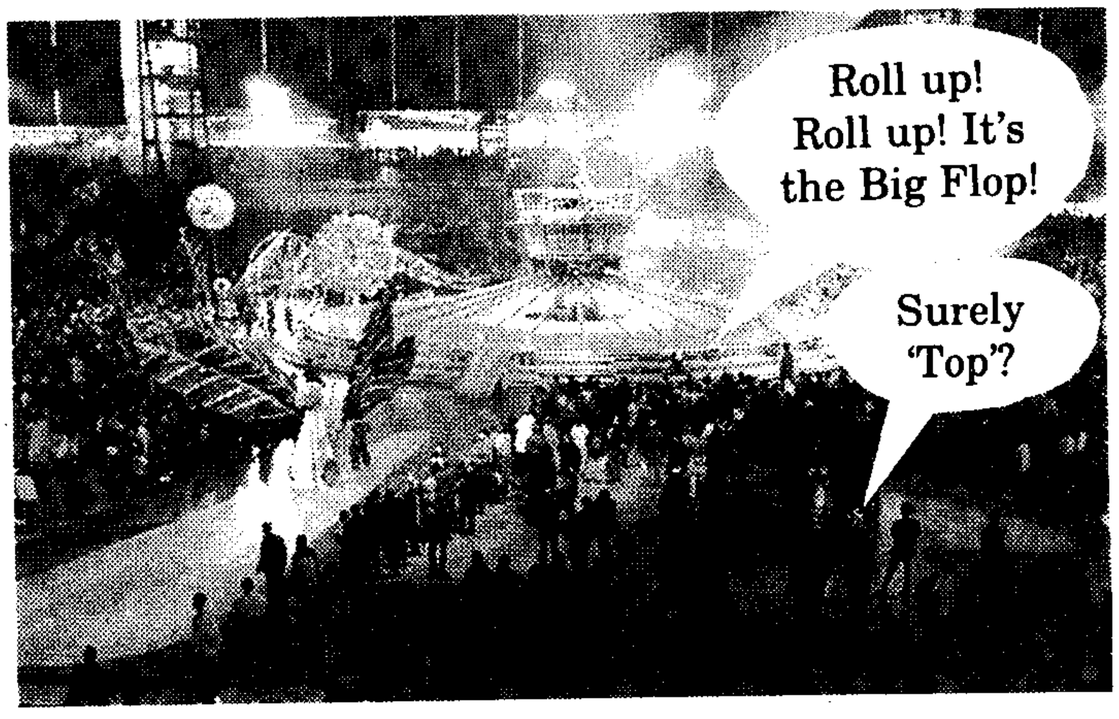
Boys	Girls
Ethelred	Boadicea
Wayne	Posh
Darren	Scary
Peregrine Worsthorne	Mel
Becks	Petronella
Mohamed Al Fayed	Mrs Thatcher
Red Rum	Madonna
Red Ken	Polly Toynbee
Simon de Montfort	Mo
Simon Jenkins	Delia

Yours,
REVEREND JACK NUTTER,
The Vicarage, Duncountin, Nutts.

School news

St Cakes

Greenwich Mean Term begins today. There are 2,784 boys queuing to get in. J.R.R. Millennium-Dome (Falconers) is Master of the Zones. P.D.K. Jubilee-Line (Failures) will arrive next term. Ms Jennie Page will not be replaced as Matron. Mr Michael Grade (D.C.) will be directing this term's end-of-term entertainment, Rodgers & Hammersmith's "Okladoma" in the Cake-a-Rama (sponsored by McVitie's). Tickets from the Bursar Brigadier Hezza Heseltine (O.C.) have unfortunately not been sent out. Queuings will be on 7th March.



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo! And a Happy New Millennium to you all!

Wasn't it fantastic? What a night! Everyone I've spoken to agrees with me that our Millennium Tent celebration was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to St Albion's!

From start to finish it was a total triumph! And when, on the stroke of midnight, the Massed Choirs of the Cubs and Brownies lit their Millennium sparklers and sang "Away In A Manger" to the tune of John Lennon's "Imagine", I don't mind admitting that Cherie and I both shed a tear!

But it's unfair to single out just that moment! There was so much about our Millennium Evening that was unforgettable!

The Weightwatchers' Ladies Line Dance ensemble (those who hadn't gone down with the flu!) were amazing, performing to a selection of James Bond theme-tunes!

Wasn't Mr Fry from the Jokes 'n' Novelties Shop a hoot, with his amusing monologue? (Though some of it was a bit risqué – come on, Stephen, it's not clever or funny, that toilet stuff!)

And congratulations to Mr Wilmot from Stilts R Us for entertaining us all so royally before he fell over. (You'll be pleased to hear that he's making a full recovery in the Orthopaedic Unit of St Albion's Cottage Hospital!)

And the "Zones" themselves were truly out of this world – the "Body Zone" with its amazing 4 ft. high papier mâché model of a human being (which was very nearly finished in time for the opening!); the "Technology Zone" with its selection of computer games, such as Zombiekiller III, Cybermurder and Nintendo Badminton; the "Nutrition Zone" with its interactive burger-stand (the kids loved this one! You just give the staff a £10 note, and they give you a shake of your choice, fries and a Millenniburger!); and, of course, we mustn't forget the "Multi-Faith Zone", with its message of hope for the future symbolised by a single bare light-bulb and a "prayer chair" for interdenominational meditation (kindly lent by St Albion's Primary School).

All of which puts into perspective the so-called "hiccups" which some people in the parish have been trying to blow up out of all proportion.

Yes, it is true that a small minority of parishioners, not more than a few thousand, failed to get their tickets on time, due to the fact that Mrs Page had forgotten to send them out (goodness me, Jennie can't be expected to do everything!).

Yes, there were a few queues for some of the more popular exhibits – but that just

goes to show how popular they were, doesn't it!

Yes, there was a separate entrance to the Tent for the Vicar's party, after our drinks in the vicarage – but that was for security, as advised by Mr Straw, the head of our Neighbourhood Watch, in case a stray firework landed on the Vicar's head and ruined the evening for everyone!

Yes, the much-looked-forward-to "Paddling Pool of Fire" was a bit of a disappointment, but Mr Falconer assures me that, if only the lights had been turned off, we would all have seen it clearly for a few seconds.

But to pretend that these tiny glitches amounted to a "total fiasco", as some people have said, beggars belief!

As I said in my Millennium Sermon, "The Tent is a beacon, lighting the way to the future, just as St Albion's itself is a beacon, shining out against all the forces of darkness-ism. That is why we must all be beacons, spreading the message of a new dawn as we enter a new era."

I have tried to put this message into a chorus which we will try out at our family service on Sunday:

"New, new, new,
It's new for me and you.
Old, old, old,
It's what we don't want to be told.
New, new, new,
Is the song we all must sing.
Old, old, old,
That is not the thing."

Words and music, T. Blair.

Try and memorise the words, so that you don't just stand there on Sunday looking glum (like some people did at the Millennium Tent during Auld Lang Syne!).

Yours millennially!

Tony

Notices

There will be no further joint services with the United Reformed Liberal Democrat Church. This is because their new minister, the Rev. Charles Kennedy, has failed to appreciate that the co-operation between our two churches could only work so long as there is a proper spirit of give and take: I give the services, and Mr Kennedy will take round the plate.

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Dyke from the TV rental shop (and one of our sponsors) who I'm afraid lost his temper in the queue to get into the Millennium Tent. May Greg remember that anger is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and as a lesson in humility it did him no harm at all to be kept waiting for a few hours out in the rain with all the ordinary parishioners. Remember, as it says in the New Labour Bible, "The last shall be last, and the first shall be first-class." (*Letter to the Millennians*)

● Mr Dobson, who wants to be the Lord Mayor in the pantomime but keeps laughing at all the wrong moments. May Frank remember that it's all very well being jolly but sometimes seriousness is required, and Ms Jackson — who also wants to be Mayor — is *very* good at being serious. Know what I mean, Frank?

● Mr Brown, who has done nothing wrong in buying a knock-down flat from a discredited local businessman who used to be a friend of mine but is now an ex-friend. Gordon will need all our support at this time of crisis and I for one certainly don't find his problems at all funny. Ha ha ha!

T.B.

LAYING ON OF HANDS
The Vicar heals a young flu victim. A.C.

POLLY FILLER

VISITS THE DOME

I WENT to Greenwich with an *open mind*. My editor had told me "See what you think. The fact that I was kept standing around for four hours at Stratford East on New Year's Eve and didn't even get a bloody drink should not sway you one way or the other." As I left the office he quipped, "If you want to give the Dome a good kicking, so be it."

So there we were on the Jubilee Line: me, the useless Simon, toddler Charlie, and Ingrid the new Latvian au-pair.

Things got off to a bad start when there were only three spare seats left in the carriage and Charlie had to sit on someone's lap (the miserable Ingrid's, of course, who then moaned about carrying the buggy and the baby bag as well as Simon's new digital camera – honestly!). When the train finally got to the Dome (nearly 2½ minutes late, due to stopping at every station on the way and picking up lots of unnecessary passengers) we were confronted by an incredibly rude official who asked us to join the queue. Us?

I was furious, as were all the rest of the queue who joined with me in shouting abuse at this ill-mannered jobsworth when I marched to the front of the long line.

"Get to the back, you silly bitch," they shouted at the stupid man. But it was no use. He would not let us through so the sullen Ingrid had to queue up for over two hours in the rain while we went off to the pub.

WHEN we eventually got in (the dim-witted Ingrid called us on the mobile only just in time!), the Zones themselves were predictably pathetic. Admittedly, Charlie seemed to enjoy the Play Zone, and the Learning Zone and the Body Zone and the circus show, but then he is a child. The Dome is hardly aimed at him!

My view is that as a family outing, the place is a disaster (zone!!). There is nowhere to smoke, Simon couldn't be dragged away from the interactive games and the toddler threw a tantrum when I said we were leaving early. That shows what he thought of it!

Honestly, when you compare this shambles to Euro-Disney World in Paris where the queues are non-existent, the rides last for hours and the food is fantastic, the Dome really sums up our national inability to organise a fun day out. Perhaps the last word should come not from me but from the disappointed Charlie. "I want to go again tomorrow," he screamed.Sad!

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'QUEUING ZONE ENORMOUS SUCCESS' SAYS FALCONER

by Our Dome Staff **Adman Nicolson** (author of *Dome Sweet Dome —The Miracle of Greenwich*)

BY FAR the most popular zone in the Millennium Dome has turned out to be the Queuing Zone, where members of the public can stand in line for four or five hours waiting for nothing to happen.

Said 11-year-old Jason Madeupname "It was fantastic. We inched forward, a millimetre at a time, for what seemed like a millennium. I couldn't wait to start the whole queue again."

Jason was just one of thousands of visitors who acclaimed the Queuing Zone as the highlight of the whole Dome experience.

"You start with a feeling of exciting anticipation," said Jason's father, Rod Madeupname. "Then after an hour or two this changes to boredom and irritation, ending up with a great rush of anger in the last couple of hours. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

"The only disappointment," he said, "was this silly model of a human body at the end. But luckily that took only two minutes and then we were free to go home."

THESE BOOTS ARE MADE FOR QUEUING

Wallace Gromitski, 26, the Polish-born creative co-ordinator of the Queuing Zone, said "I am delighted by the success of our concept. I was determined to create something really British, which would express the essence of your national character. Standing around for hours being ripped off seemed to fit the bill."

AITKEN PLOT FOILED

by Our Prison Staff **Lunchtime O'Penprison**

A SINISTER plot to portray Jonathan Aitken in a good light has been uncovered at the last minute, according to Fleet Street insiders.

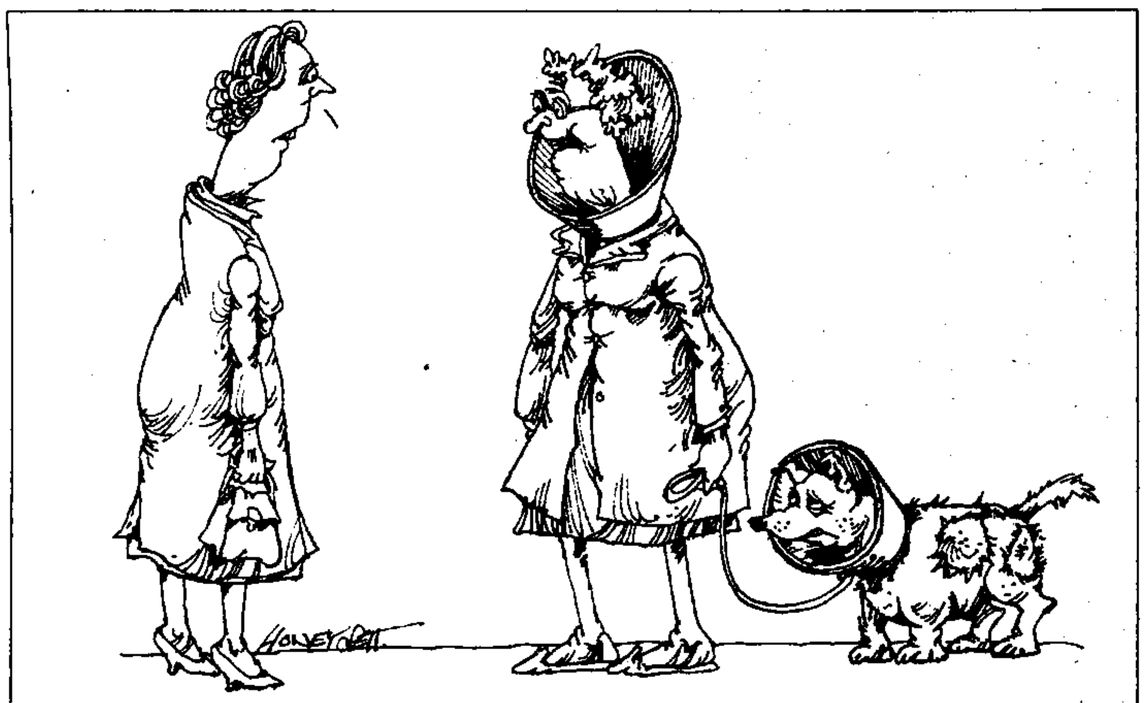
The plan, organised by old lags at the Daily Telegraph, involved dressing Jonathan Aitken up in a suit, taking photographs of him nakedly going to church and putting these pictures in a national newspaper.

"Thank heavens we discovered this foul scheme to rehabilitate him," said a Home Office spokesman. "Jonathan Aitken should be allowed to serve his sentence in peace without having nice things written about him in the papers."

MARITIME GREENWICH UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

DYSELXIA LEARNING SUPPORT TUTOR (REF: 140.46)

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW



"No, I don't bite myself, I just wear it to make him feel less self-conscious"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wither Conservatism?

From John Major and Others

Sir, As loyal members of the Conservative Party, we wish to protest in the strongest possible terms at the outrageous way in which Mr William Hague has taken our Party from the old One Nation, centre-ground, concensus politics of Mrs Thatcher to the extreme right-wing fanaticism of Hague's obsession with remaining in Europe but not joining the euro before the end of the next Parliament.

If Hague continues with this lurch towards Fascist "Little Englandism", there is a very strong possibility that he will soon be as unpopular as we were when we were thrown out in 1997. That is why our advice to the British people must be "Vote Labour".

Yours loyally,
JOHN MAJOR (53fl)
LORD HOWE OF DEADSHEEP
LORD BRITTAN OF BRUSSELS
KENNETH CLARKE (Lab.)
MICHAEL HESELTINE (Ret'd.)
SHAGGER NORRIS, London
Mayor-Erect *(Surely "Elect"? Ed.)*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Desmond Llewellyn, Actor

So. Farewell then
"Q"
Armourer to James Bond
In all
94 films.

Inventor of the tootbrush
That turned into
A speedboat.
And the cufflink that became
An atomic bomb.

"Now listen carefully
Double-0 7."
That was your catchphrase.

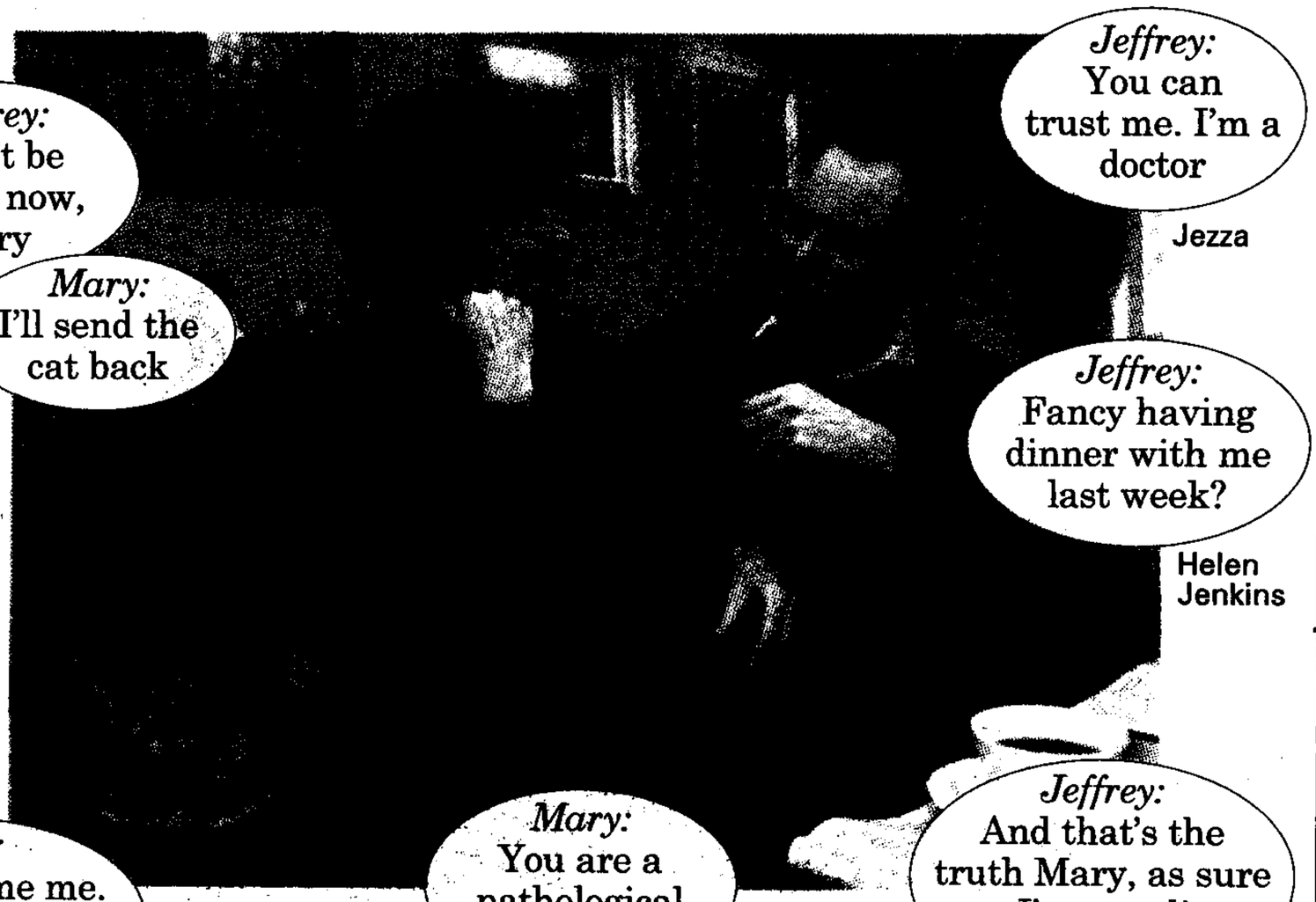
"Don't touch that, Bond!"
That was another.

It will not be the same
With John Cleese.

Keith says
"Dead parrots will not help you
Escape from SMERSH."
(No disrespect intended to
Our foremost "Python!")

E.J. Thribb (17½)

GRAND ARCHER BUBBLE COMPETITION


Jeffrey: I can't be mayor now, Mary
Martin Pratt
Mary: I'll send the cat back
Jeffrey: You can trust me. I'm a doctor
Jezza
Jeffrey: Fancy having dinner with me last week?
Helen Jenkins
Jeffrey: And that's the truth Mary, as sure as I'm standing here
Andrew Nickolds
Mary: You are a pathological liar
J&N Woods
Jeffrey: No, I'm not
Cat: Don't blame me. I didn't bring him in the house
Brian Davies
Cat: I wish I had moved in with the Hamiltons
Anne Wilson
Jeffrey: The last pussy I had cost two thousand pounds
Tony Brown

Many thanks for the hundreds and hundreds of entries to the quiz. These are the best to date – the winner of the Archer Toilet seat will be announced next issue. Ed.

YOBS
HUSBAND
Hiya Joe, this is Tricia my fiancee
Yeah, I know Tricia, Hi
Hey Trish can you still do that routine with your pelvic muscles?!

My Night Out At The Dome

by Dominic Lawson (aged 11½)

Yesterday we went to the Dome for our holiday treat. We put our best clothes on and we were really looking forward to it. But guess what? We only got stuck at the station for four hours.

What a total swizz! I got jolly batey, I can tell you!

© Dome-nic Law-Zone, The Sunday Telegraph 2000

The Daily Mel-egraph

(formerly the Daily Hurleygraph) Friday, January 14, 2000

Tragic Mel G Leaves Home Weeping

By Our Political Staff Charles Moorerubbishplease

THE NATION was in shock last night as the news broke that Spice Girl "Mel G", known to her millions of fans as "Scary", has separated from her husband of five minutes, Mr James Gazza.

The weeping superstar told the Daily Telegraph, "I am totally gutted by what's happened to me. But the most important thing now is that Baby Phoenix grows up without her father."

Posh Admits 'Becks Loves My Thongs – Even Though I Cannot Thing'

By Our Domestic Staff Tharah Thands

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH can exclusively reveal that Spice Girl Victoria Beckham, known to her millions of fans as "Posh", went on television yesterday and said something very important to TV presenter Johnnie Vaughan.

On Other Pages

Big pix of Catherine Zeta Jones **2**

Train Crash In Norway **94**

Plus

Editorial: The Old Thongs Are The Besht by Bill Deedes

Britains biggest-selling quality daily

FLU WHAT A SCORCHER!

60-70-80-90 (per cent of newspapers are filled with flu)

by Our Flu Staff **Sydney Virus**

BRITAIN is paralysed, according to experts, since the most severe outbreak of pieces about flu since the great Flu Story Epidemic of last year.

The symptoms are all too familiar weak storylines, fever-pitch writing and swollen headlines.

Add to this a nationwide shortage of stories and you have an epidemic of *(continued in 94% of the paper)*

PROFILE

ALI F
THE NEW COMEDY SENSATION

THIS CHRISTMAS everyone was laughing at the antics of the hysterical Ali F, Britain's newest and funniest comic. With his ridiculous accent and humorous catchphrases ("Fuggin conspiracy, innit?") Ali F has become the comedy cult of the Millennium.

Ali F (real name Mohamed Al Fayed) pretends to be a British citizen and has hilarious encounters with the great and the good.

In one classic encounter he accuses a baffled Prince Philip of being "a fuggin' murderer". In another he asks a confused Jack Straw why he can't have "a fuggin' passport". In the best skit of all he takes on Tory MP Neil Hamilton and cons him into asking dodgy questions for him in Parliament!

"Ali F is beyond satire," said top comedy producer Toppo Thompson of *The 11 Viewers Show*. "In the great tradition of British Comedy we laugh at him rather than with him."

On other pages

● *Huge Asteroid To Hit Earth – Millions of unsold copies of Punch to obliterate planet 94*

ROY of the ROVERS
MANCHESTER ROVERS ARE IN RIO FOR THE CLUB WORLD CUP. BUT THEY ARE STRUGGLING AND ROY HAS BEEN SENT OFF...
I DON'T WANT TO SEE ANY MORE RED
RIGHT!
I WANT TO SEE SOME BOTTLE
RIGHT!
IS FACTOR 15 STRONG ENOUGH?
COME ON YOU TANS
SUN

Private Eye's SPECIAL MILLENNIUM SOUVENIR ISSUE

YES — IT'S 2000!

'I See Sun Rise On Kiritekanawa Islands'

by Our Man On The Meridian Line **Phil Space**

THE WORLD has seen nothing like it for 1000 years, or perhaps longer.

Today I saw with my own eyes the once-in-a-lifetime spectacle of the first sun of the new Millennium rising over the palm-fringed atoll of Kiritekanawa (formerly the *Gilbert* and George Islands).

As the first rays of millennial light pierced the low clouds over the Pacific horizon, a chorus of grass-skirted maidens specially flown in from New Zealand burst into their traditional song Aloha Dolly, only to be drowned out by the sound of hundreds of mobile phones ringing in the pockets of journalists as their editors rang to ask them where their copy was.

KEEP GOING, ED

Make no mistake, it was an awesome moment which none of us who were there will ever remember *(Surely "forget"? Ed.)*

No sooner had the ancient ritual chanting come to an end than the hundreds of Polynesian-style dancers rushed barefoot across the coral sand to a giant TV screen showing the fireworks over Sydney Harbour Bridge.

"Not half as good as the Eiffel Tower," they all cried in unison, as they *(cont'd. p. 94)*

As seen in all papers

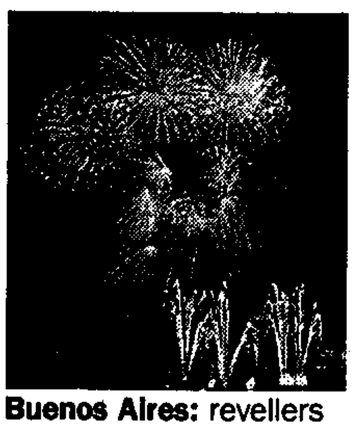
A New Dawn

AS A new millennium dawns on the anniversary of the birth of Christ and we reflect on the uncertainties of this rapidly changing world with its unending struggle between good and evil, the eternal question remains: Why the bloody hell was I made to queue for three hours with all the riff-raff just to get into the Dome where the champagne was tepid anyway. I mean, don't they know who I am?

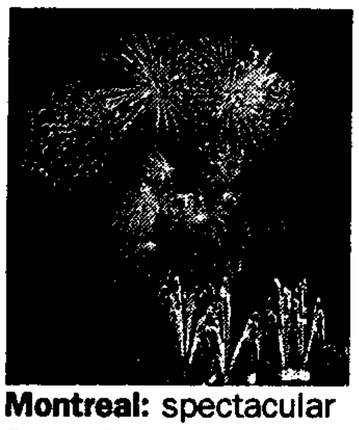
HOW THE WORLD SAW IN THAT HISTORIC MILLENNIUM

Hong Kong: a spectacular firework display greeted revellers

Moscow: revellers were greeted with a spectacular fireworks display

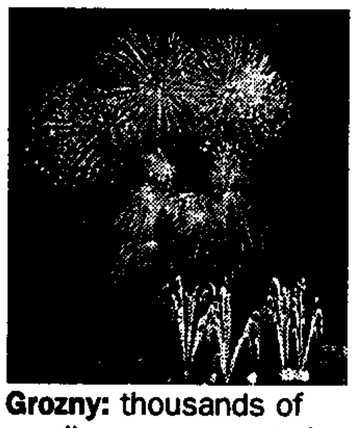


Buenos Aires: revellers agreed they had never seen such a spectacular display of fireworks



Montreal: spectacular fireworks were greeted by revellers

Kinshasa: thousands of revellers were greeted by one firework



Grozny: thousands of revellers were greeted by a spectacular display of rockets laid on by the Russian army

● **More Firework Pictures – pages 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 etc.**

Copies of this historic issue are already collectors' items and are changing hands for hundreds of pounds.

Send off now for extra copies to pass on to your children and their children's children to put in their hamster cages *(surely "to cherish for ever"? Ed).*

2000 Zero Gravitas

by Andrew Lloyd-Motion

(To be sung to the tune of Auld Lang Syne)

This voice came into my head. "My God,"
It said. "It is the Millennium. And
As the Poet Laureate
I've got to write a poem about it.
I was making myself a cup
Of Nescafe at the time, in
The kitchen.
Through the window I saw a
Robin, singing with the sad music
Of the bird tribe.
"Hullo," I said, "would you like
Some of this rich tea biscuit?"
But he flew away, leaving the
Space on my window-sill
Empty. Just as one year flies
Away, leaving nothing in its place
Except another year. Another year,
Another century, another millennium,
Another cup of coffee.
How time flies!

Reprinted by permission of The Mail on Sunday £2000 *(surely 2000 A.D.?)*

To The Editor of the Daily Telegraph

Her Majesty And The So-Called Dome

SIR – No wonder Her Majesty looked so disapproving as she refused to cross hands during the singing of Auld Lang Syne. She was clearly expressing her contempt for Mr Blair's touchy-feely New Labour nonsense which the so-called Dome so eloquently symbolises.

SIR BUFTON TUFTON MEP
St Rasburg,
Dorset.

SIR – Whatever your ignorant correspondents may think, Her Majesty proved once again to be *the only* person in the entire Dome who was fully conversant with the correct procedure for the singing of Auld Lang Syne. As the Queen demonstrated, it is customary to sing the first verse merely holding hands with one's immediate neighbour and looking very bad-tempered. Only at the start of the second verse are the arms crossed. The words of this verse, with which only the Queen seemed familiar, are as follows:

Awa' wi' ye, ye whey-faced loon
We'll ha' nae truck wi' your silly doom.
Sae gang awa' ye sleekit beastie,
An' leave the rest o' us tae feastie! (Rabbi Burns attr.)

It was of course Queen Victoria who instituted the customary singing of this song at Balmoral at Hogmanay accompanied by a lone piper, and Her present Majesty has faithfully honoured this tradition until this year's travesty in the so-called Dome.

THE McMASSINGBERD
OF THAT ILK
Isle of Eigg-on-Toast,
Skye Sports.

SIR – The McMassingberd of McMassingberd is quite wrong to claim that the Queen crossed hands in the second verse of Auld Lang Syne, when she pointedly refrained from doing any such thing. Traditionally, participants only cross hands in the third verse, which the organisers of the so-called Dome did not even deign to include. The words of this verse, attributed to Bonnie Prince Charlie, are as follows:

You gang och doon yon bonnie glen,
Clags breeches brune and doon agane,
You hamish doch auld Donny Dewar,
And heave Lord Lairg into the sewer.

SIR JOHN FARQUHAR-SMITH
(Honorary Clan Chief of the
Clan McFarquhar-Smith)
Stevenage, Herts.

From The Perkins Family

SIR – I think we can top the experience of the Pinkerton family of Ongar. Our family (including a 97-year-old great-grandmother and three toddlers under 2) set off from Trafalgar Square just after midnight and did not arrive home in Raynes Park until three days later. During this time we were not able to obtain access to a single public toilet, and were several times charged by mounted police busy searching for the killer of Jill Dando. No wonder *(cont'd. p. 94)*

60 Years On

CHURCHILL DIDN'T LIKE DE GAULLE
World Stunned By Shock Revelations

by Our Historical Staff **R. Kive**

IN TOP-secret papers, only just released by the Public Record Office, Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill is shown to have had a "positive dislike" of the French leader General Charles de Gaulle.

In a shock memo dated 12 August 1944, Churchill wrote to American President Franklin Roosevelt: "This fellow de Gaulle is getting me down. He keeps on telling me how to win the war and stinks of garlic. I cannot see us ever joining the Common Market after the war."

World-famous historian Andrew Roberts writes "This totally changes our view of the Second World War. Until now we all assumed that Churchill's much-publicised hatred of de Gaulle was a cunning ruse to deceive Hitler. But now it appears that the story was true. In my book about Lord Salisbury" *(cont'd. p. 94)*

ON OTHER PAGES

Wilson Smoked Pipe **14**
Beatles Were Famous **16**
Pope Was Catholic **21**

BRITISH COUPLE REACH DOME

by Philippa Page

HISTORY was made today when a British husband-and-wife team, Mike and Fiona Anorak, became the first couple ever to get through to the fabled Dome.

"We are tired but triumphant," said computer programmer Mike Anorak, 33. "We never thought we would make it, and there were many times when, frankly, we thought we would have to turn back and go home to Wallasey."

The couple began their epic, 37-hour trek when they left their semi-detached executive home on the John Lennon Estate at 9.37 last Tuesday morning.

This was their "Timetable of Achievement" in what they are calling "the toughest journey in the world":

9.46 am Virgin service to London cancelled owing to "train shortages". Couple take mini-cab to London.

5.15 pm Couple arrive at Jubilee Line station and board train for Dome.

6.24 pm Jubilee train leaves station.

6.25 pm Train returns to station due to points failure.

9.35 pm Now facing what they described as "intolerable conditions", the Anoraks, along with 17,000 other people, are stranded at Stratford station.

11.20 pm Anoraks finally join queue for entry to Dome. Interactive electronic sign tells them "Only 14 hours to wait".

1.26 am Mrs Anorak makes near-fatal mistake by joining queue for McDonald's "Millenniumburger Experience".

5.16 am Expedition hit by mystery food poisoning. Mrs Anorak tells her husband "I don't think I can make it. You go on without me," but Mike persuades her to struggle on.

10.15 am The Anoraks now only four miles from the centre of the Dome. In his diary Mike writes, "At last the end is in sight. We can just make out the spiky bits sticking out of the roof. It is an awesome sight."

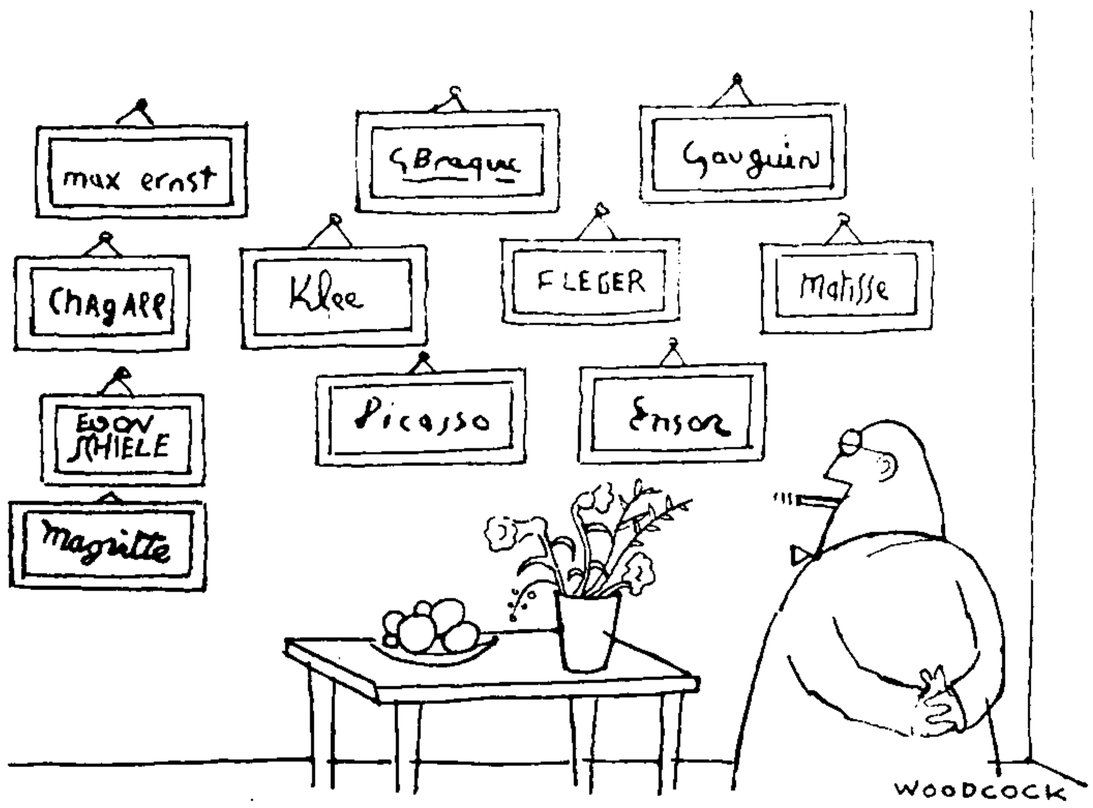
3.31 pm Success! The Anoraks finally reach their goal and raise the Union flag.

3.38 pm Security staff eject couple from Dome saying "You've had your time. There's nothing to see. Get out!"

3.39 Special message of congratulation sent to Anoraks by Prime Minister Tony Blair, praising himself for his astonishing achievement.

ON OTHER PAGES

British couple reach bankruptcy – Mr and Mrs Hamilton "Delighted" **p. 94**



DIARY

HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES'S THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I suspect that many of us will have been wondering how to approach the Millennium. A thousand years is, we can't help thinking, a very long time; longer, indeed, than any of us might reasonably expect to live, even if we take into account the encouraging new advances in the field of medicine that have occurred over the past few decades.

What, we may wonder, does the Millennium actually *mean* in the midst of our daily lives? I daresay some of us may have noticed that it is far from being a routine daily event, such as being got up in the morning, being served breakfast and being driven from A to B. Quite the opposite: it is literally years since the last Millennium. Indeed, back then, Britain was a very different sort of place, a nation full of hope and faith, rich in belief, proud to heed and obey the divine wisdom of its monarch.

Some of us may find it hard to imagine a thousand years. We are perhaps grateful to the mathematicians who remind us that it consists of a one followed by three noughts, and to the artists who inform us that it is best seen as three eggs being chased by a soldier of toast. But – to return, as all things must, to our original question – what does it all actually *mean*?

I daresay many of us will have found it easier to decide what it does *not* mean. Will it, for instance, be remembered as an "experience" – the dawning of an exciting moment when we stepped boldly across a threshold marked "21st Century" and emerged into the golden, promised land of a perennial future, where water flows uphill and the whole of humanity is genetically re-engineered and "the people" are deprived of their symbolic figurehead, and cast asunder, perhaps by a pushy prime minister, from a princely wisdom weaved, like a thread of gold, through successive generations?

Or will it, perhaps, provide a Sacred moment of reflection, a moment when, catching sight of ourselves in the mirror, we may say to ourselves, "Things are as they are. Yet being what they are, they are also somehow different. And if things were not as they are, they could not continue to be what they both have been and will be. And consequently, they – the things in question – will always be not only what they might have been and what they are, but also what they will be." It is these simple truths we are, I suspect, in danger of losing.

Will the new Millennium remind us that each New Year represents a microcosm of the vital process of renewal that dominates our existence? For each New Year reminds of the importance of natural cycles. After Winter comes the Spring, and after Spring comes the Summer. Autumn follows Summer, and after Autumn comes Winter. Then Spring arrives, followed closely by Summer. And then along comes Autumn, which in turn makes way for Winter. But soon the chill winds of Winter make way for the fresh breezes of Spring, and then comes glorious Summer with its carefree clouds and bright sunshine. But now look who's knocking on the door! It's Autumn, misty season of falling leaves and dappled valleys, all set to make way for Winter, with its harsh winds, snow in high areas and scattered showers and heavy frosts leading to hazardous conditions on the roads.

But, as Jung knew so well, there is all the difference in the world between renewing what is old and replacing old with new. A much-loved country suit, for instance, may benefit from being cleaned and pressed by those for whom that sacred task is their very lifeblood, honed and ironed with the wisdom of generations. But if that much-loved country suit is sent away, only to return as a flashy city-suit, that gentle tweed replaced with all sorts of outlandish synthetics, perhaps more suited to the discotheque, wine bar or "executive toilet" than the drawing room, then the sense of nature's continuity, of a discreet tailoring borne of centuries of craftmanship, is in danger of being damaged.

The wisdom of the years should not lightly be cast asunder. I suspect we all feel that the wisdom of mankind is, in a curious and sacred way, rather like a Royal heritage, its figurehead changing from time to time, but its role as provider of universal peace and stability forevermore, with no loss of privileges.

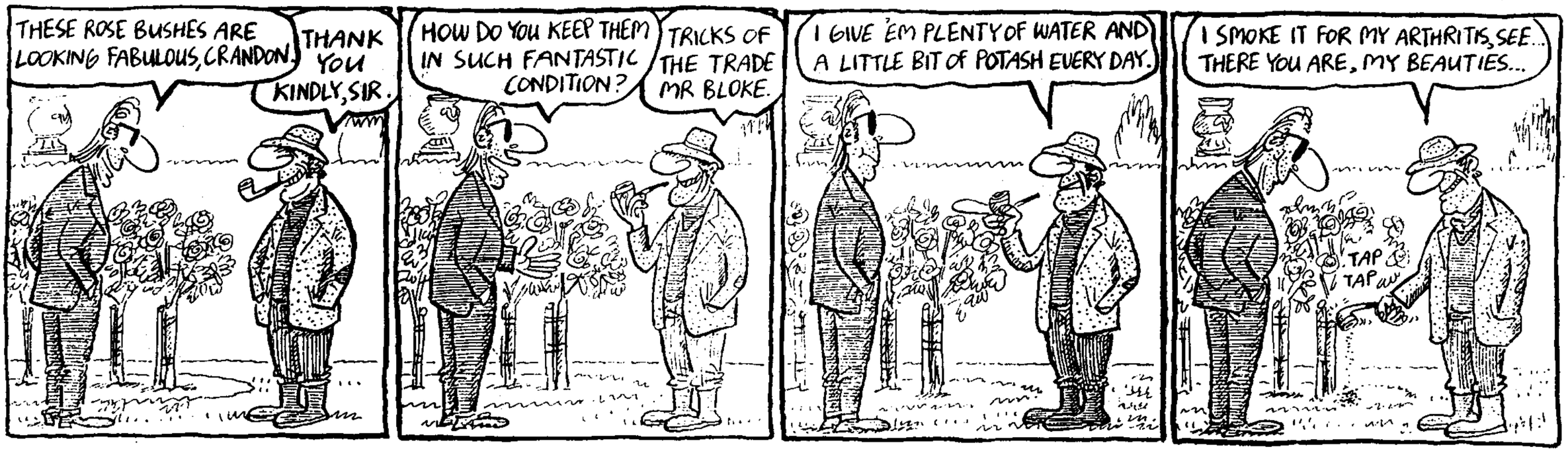
As we enter a new Millennium with all its hopes and fears, I pray we may come to realise that life is a strange paradox, full of opposites in harmony. You have to laugh, or you'd cry. Now you see it, now you don't. And as Rilke once said, what goes up must come down. In for a penny, in for a pound. Too many cooks spoil the broth. There's no time like the present. Love means never having to say you're sorry. And, as Einstein so rightly observed, you only get out of life what you put into it.

The art of living lies in striking this balance. If we lean too far to the left or right we are, I suspect, in danger of losing our balance and falling headlong into the coal-scuttle. It is a sacred thing to compose harmony out of opposites. Who can forget The Black and White Minstrels roaring their way through that much-loved classic, "Would You Like To Ride In My Beautiful Balloon?" thus helping us realise that, as Plato once noted, it takes all sorts.

In this age of secularism, when so many marriages end in divorce and so many people seem to measure their importance in society by how many houses they own or servants they employ, I hope that we will begin to rediscover a sense of the sacred in all that surrounds us.

I hope, too, that all of us may begin to grow our crops using traditional methods, so that we might be able, at the end of the day, to sell organic oatcakes under our own "logo", and also that there will be those of us with the vision to set up nationwide schemes to help motivate our young, with all their marvellous youth. But to do so we must first of all understand that life is a more profound experience than we are told it is. As Dante has taught us, tomorrow is the first day of the rest of our life. Not counting today, perhaps.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


THESE ROSE BUSHES ARE LOOKING FABULOUS, CRANDON.
THANK YOU KINDLY, SIR.
HOW DO YOU KEEP THEM IN SUCH FANTASTIC CONDITION?
TRICKS OF THE TRADE MR BLOKE.
I GIVE 'EM PLENTY OF WATER AND A LITTLE BIT OF POTASH EVERY DAY.
I SMOKE IT FOR MY ARTHRITIS, SEE... THERE YOU ARE, MY BEAUTIES...
TAP TAP aw

Literary Review

More is less

More Matter
John Updike
(Hamish Hamilton, £25)

IN these times of cutbacks and fiscal say-nays, you have to be pretty grand to be able to kid some hapless publisher into printing up your old book reviews.

Mart manages it, and Claire Tomalin recently prevailed upon the kind people at Viking Penguin to do the same for her stack of *ancient* literary journalism. But when it comes to breathing life into the pale ashes of the last year or the last decade's book chat, John Updike is in a class of his own.

Nine hundred pages long, following in the wake of other epic assemblages such as 1983's *Hugging the Shore* and 1991's *Odd Jobs, More Matter* is entirely gratuitous. The best American stories of fifteen years back? Mediocre Yankee novels from thirty years ago? Well, what Updike thought about them — mostly in the eternally hospitable pages of the Noo Yawker — is painstakingly reproduced down to the last comma.

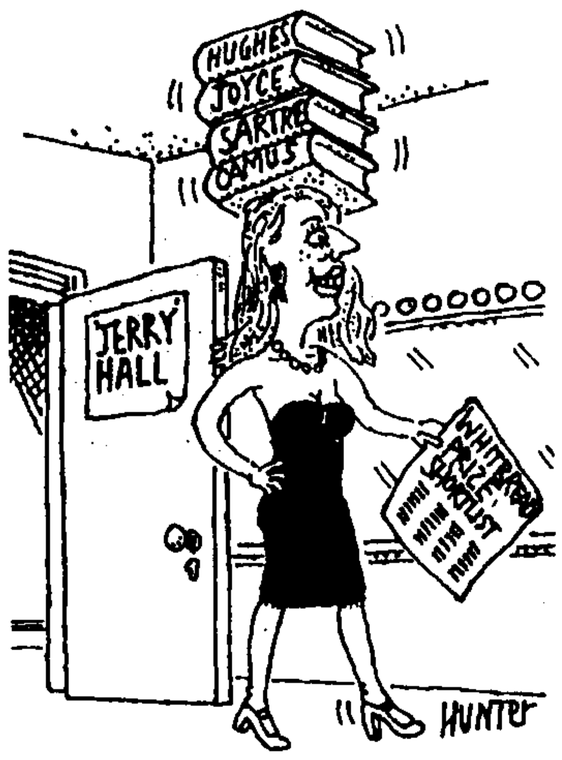
Given the near absolute OK-ness of Updike's work, persona and reputation on this side of the Atlantic, it's a mite disappointing to discover how wordy, prolix (British critics perennially knuckle their eyes over the sheer space bestowed by US editors on their name reviewers) and self-absorbed most of this is. Like Updike's fiction, ominously enough, everything — every finely flossed phrase, every bonhomous authorial twitch — is expressly designed to draw the reader close to the artefact on view, and yet somehow leaves him or her a good few inches further away.

Thus Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* is "pungent, shapely and instructive" or Alain de Botton's *Proust Can Change Your Life* is characterised as "providing of that vast sacred lake a sweet and lucid distillation". It all sounds rather like a Victorian man of letters writing circa 1883.

Sometimes the wordiness inclines towards the tongue-in-cheek. All too often, though, the pageant of spruced-up banalities (Frank Kermode's autobiography contains "only the most indirect hints that this abject confessor to failure and dereliction is an esteemed critic and venerated professor") lies halfway between an awareness of comic possibilities and self-defence.

Updike's insularity is endlessly fascinating, too, as in the review of a biography of the Queen where a certain amount of lofty republicanism is swiftly elbowed aside by the most rapt outsider curiosity, which nevertheless manages to get both Her Majesty and her role hopelessly wrong.

Every so often, as in the novels, something stirs, but the rest, though, is vanity publishing in the strictest sense of the term — a book that was published to flatter the author's ego.



BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE bumper crop of literary eminences in last week's honours list — Sir Malcolm, Doris Lessing CH *et al* — raises an all too infrequently asked question on the literary-cum-publishing circuit: how do you go about getting a literary gong? The best way of doing it, inevitably, is to have some highly-placed carpet crawler busily pulling wires on your behalf. On the evidence of the recently published second volume of his journals, the late Woodrow Wyatt spent much of his time advancing the claims of literary chums — angling for a knighthood for dear old Kingsley, for example, or collecting signatures on behalf of A.L. Rowse. The ghastly thing, too, is how often the old fathead's winners romped home — even Rowse got a CH just before his death.

Short of Lord Wyatt or his contemporary Millbank equivalent gamely conspiring on your behalf, the next best way is to have the Royal Society of Literature — chaired by the amiable figure of Michael Holroyd CBE — including you in its periodic submissions to Number Ten. Or just get married to someone important. Does anyone really think that Gail Rebuck, chief executive of Random House, got a CBE because her outfit makes a significant contribution to the cultural and economic life of the nation? Alas no, her husband happens to be "new" Labour supremo Philip Gould.

Casting an eye down the list, one finds the trendy (Ian McEwan), the long-service awards (Kathleen Raine and Frances Partridge, joint ages 190) and even the deserving. Whatever one may think of Malcolm Bradbury's catch-call criticism or his habitual softness in the presence of books written by his friends, the man has at least spent most of his professional life sticking up for the best interests of literature, and of how many modern literature professors can that be said?

All the same there are the usual conspicuous absentees. Is anyone ever going to recognise the contribution to the English novel made by William Cooper (89 last month)? Meanwhile the usual roster of ironies moves into place alongside, chief among them the fact that Bloomsbury survivor Frances Partridge CBE, 100 years old come March, is currently without a publisher for the latest instalment of her scintillating diaries.

■ *MORE testimony to the immense charm of Lord Archer comes from one of our leading authors who had the misfortune some years back to follow in the grand liar's footsteps on a literary tour of the United States.*

Her media minder there — the man who drove her from television interview to literary lunch to book-signing — appeared to be unduly anxious about his hair, his suit and his manners. "Everything's fine," said the British writer reassuringly. "Why do you keep asking?"

Because, the escort replied, the man voted America's "Author from Hell" had recently demanded that he have a hair cut and change his suit, among a whole string of other weird and unreasonable demands — like making unsolicited calls on the car phone to the White House.

In fact, said the escort, Jeffrey Archer – for it was he — was such a renowned bully that care was taken to ensure he only ever had male minders: he had reduced all the women to tears.

■ FORMER Spice Girl Geri Halliwell's autobiography *If Only...* (*Eye* 990) may have been a bestseller for Transworld, but the glory has not been reflected on the imprint that actually forked out the ridiculous sum of £500,000 to agent Mark Lucas for the rights.

The title was brought into the Transworld fold by Partridge Press, its cheerily bloke-ish colophon, noted in the past for its sporting memoirs but now expanding its range into showbiz.

Unfortunately la Halliwell and her people decided after the auction that the Partridge profile wasn't quite *her*. As a result the publisher — anxious to protect its investment — obliged by moving the book on to the upmarket Bantam list, rather to the chagrin of its populist arm.

■ **BIZARRE scenes at Macmillan where Picador publisher Peter "Eeyore" Straus was sighted undertaking a lap of honour of the company's Belgravia offices after being declared "the Book Trade's Sexiest Male" in a *Publishing News* article claiming to look ahead to the coming year. In his reverie, it seems the handsome Eeyore brushed aside all suggestions the piece might be a spoof.**

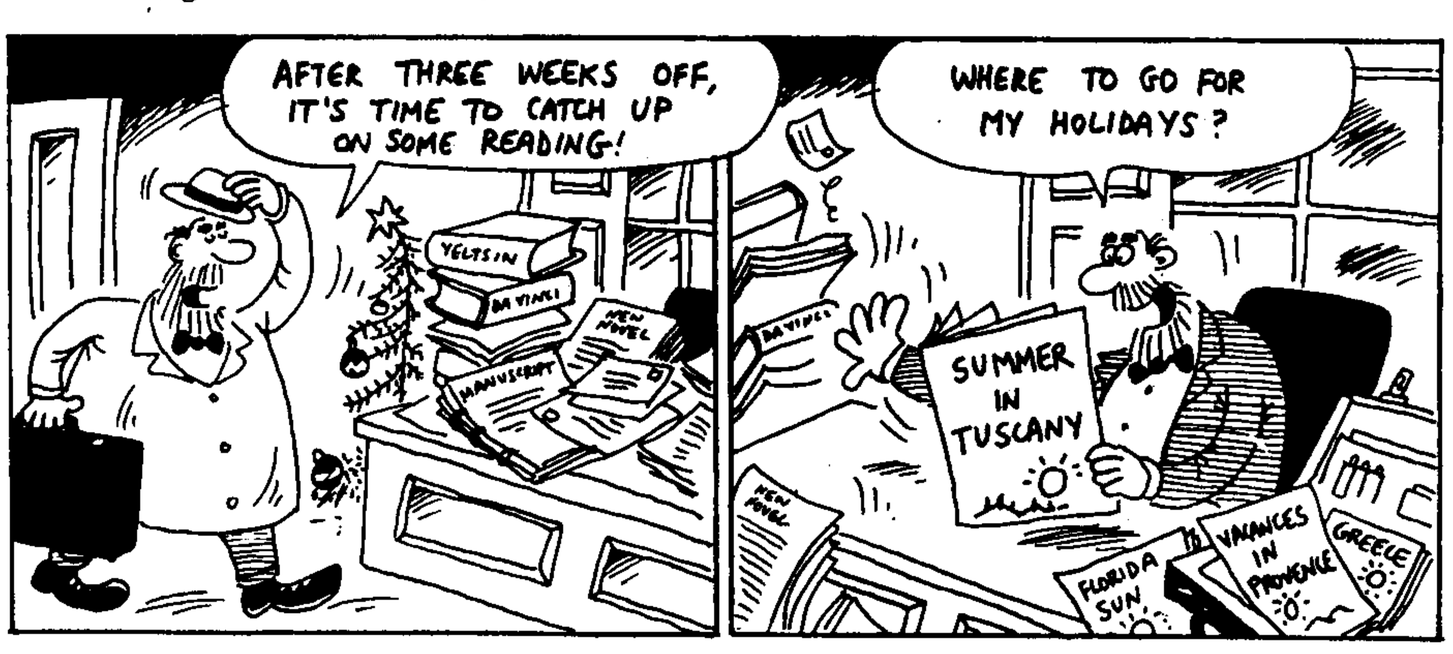
■ ANTHONY SHIEL, who last year left the literary agency he founded in high dudgeon after a row with his business partner, Sonia Land (see *Eyes passim*), has finally resigned his directorship of Sheil Land Associates. However, he remains a director of SLA's holding company, Peach Publishing Ltd, and the second largest individual shareholder. If Sheil had retired, this wouldn't be too much of a problem. However, it represents something of a conflict of interests, if, as is understood, Sheil has gone to work with rival agent Gillon Aitken.

■ FORMER MI5 whistleblower David Shayler has been writing a novel while in exile in France, which he promises will blow the lid off the secret world of espionage and anti-terrorism. Here is a first extract from "The Organisation" to whet publishers appetites.

I ache. In my groin. In my chest. In my shoulders. Helpless. I do nothing. I don't have to. I am kissed. I am bitten. I am stroked. I am massaged. Gentle fingers probe my balls and my thighs. Soft hands cup my genitals. And caress. My scrotum is a purple walnut. My hard-on is an ice-blue diamond. But both burn and pump...

I tease her dark, suction tip nipples. I draw them out still further. Juices ooze from her, like warm honey from baclava. I plunge my tongue through the crust. I flick. I tease. I caress. I nurture. I lick. I eat. I love. And she is awash. Ripples turn to tidal waves, drenching me. Overwhelmed, it is her turn to wail for her demon lover. Four or five times before collapsing boneless.

'Bookworm'



IN THE BACK

What we are about to receive...

DESPITE chancellor Gordon Brown's reputation for rectitude, the chain of coincidences involved in his purchase at a knockdown price of a flat behind Westminster Abbey grows ever more remarkable. And the embarrassment can only grow since the mysterious collapse of TransTec.

Brown bought the third-floor flat from AGB Research, a failed Maxwell company of which Labour multimillionaire Geoffrey Robinson had been a director. The City accountant selling the Maxwell asset was of course Arthur Andersen, now a big chum of "new" Labour.

This Maxwell-Robinson-Andersen axis promises to produce even more blushes for the party now that TransTec is in receivership.

The chairman of TransTec in its halcyon days was none other than Robinson, the MP who later became "new" Labour's first paymaster-general (Gordon was his boss) and benefactor of "new" Labour icon Peter Mandelson.

The most serious allegation is that Robinson's business interests were hopelessly entwined with those of the late Robert Maxwell, and that the Maxwell nightmare for old Labour may be revisited on the new variety.

All these allegations will of course be thoroughly sorted out by the receiver to TransTec, who has just been appointed... by TransTec. The name of the receiver is familiar: none other than... Arthur Andersen, which will bring relief to ministers. Many times in recent years the *Eye* has drawn attention to the cordial relations between Andersen's and "new" Labour.

There was the expensive hiring of Labour high-flyer Patricia Hewitt as Andersen's head of research in 1994 (*Eye* 846). (Hewitt left Andersen's when she was elected in the general election and is now one of Geoffrey Robinson's successor ministers at the treasury).

Then there were the free "training sessions for government" for new Labour ministers at an Oxford college in the summer of 1997 (*Eye* 955); the lifting on the ban on Arthur Andersen doing any government work because of its role in the de Lorean affair — a ban imposed and sustained for many years by the previous Tory government (*Eye* 938); and the free consultancy work provided by Andersen's for the Labour think tank IPPR (*Eye* 846).

In ordinary circumstances ministers could well surmise that nothing in the Andersen investigation of the TransTec affair could possibly be unfair to Geoffrey Robinson or his former ministerial colleagues. But the circumstances are not ordinary. Andersen's announces that it is bringing a former partner out of retirement to help deal with the TransTec receivership. He is John Talbot, who was the partner in charge of the receivership of much of the Maxwell empire after the fat man was found dead in the sea in 1991.

Mr Talbot showed a lot of interest in the future of one of Maxwell's few profitable concerns — Mirror Group newspapers. He contemptuously dismissed the attempts of the *Daily Mirror* editor to take over the *Mirror* and run it with recognised trade unions. Instead he favoured the appointment as chief executive of former *News of the World* editor and crazed union-buster, David Montgomery. The Montgomery putsch in 1992 owed a lot to the support of John Talbot, and led at once to an unseemly cull of trade unionists and a steep decline in the *Mirror*'s circulation and influence — a decline only recently halted when Montgomery was finally sacked.

A spokesman for the public relations firm hired by Arthur Andersen to deal with this matter tells the *Eye* that the official announcement of John Talbot's involvement in TransTec in no way mentions his connection (or that of the other two Arthur Andersen accountants involved) with the Maxwell empire. "John Talbot is a reputed accountant with a lot of experience in the motor industry," he explained.

One thing is certain, however. If Robinson's connections to Maxwell, via Hollis Industries, etc, are a matter of concern to the receivers of TransTec, no one will know more detail about the background than John Talbot.

● *See Slicker, page 28*

Carpet clean-up

Geoff Brady

IT IS more than a year since the *Eye* (961) called "no tears please" for Allied Carpets finance director David Pout, and accountancy firm Arthur Andersen, which "resigned" (was sacked) after a whistleblower exposed an accounting scam which cost the company £6m.

Pout left with a £221,000 pay-off and Arthur Andersen got £370,000 for its report into what had gone wrong and why it hadn't noticed.

What Allied Carpets needed, urgently, was a brand new chief executive. It got him in July last year — Geoff Brady, 45, whose annual salary of £221,000 was boosted by a million "phantom" share options, awarded to him on the basis that Allied Carpets shares were worth 31 pence.

In a matter of weeks along came a French group, Tapis Saint-Maclau, to buy Allied Carpets and send the share price soaring.

When it hit 93p, Mr Brady decided to leave Allied to join an internet retailer which will "float" this year and almost certainly make him a million or two. He had worked for Allied Carpets for five whole months. His contract entitled him to a pay-off of £330,000, and he made £620,000 from his "phantom" share options which he had never bought. Total package for five months' work: £1m.

OTT OSD... as seen on CCTV

A YEAR after Anthony Valerio was assaulted by members of Merseyside Police's notorious operational support group, OSD (*Eye* 968), he has received £15,000 in damages, despite criminal charges against his two uniformed assailants being dropped by the crown prosecution service.

Valerio probably wouldn't have got this if his beating with OSD batons not been captured, Rodney King style, on CCTV.

The policeman who then kept the relevant tape in his drawer on the grounds that he "didn't think it showed anything" has since been "advised" on behaviour by his superiors, while another has been "admonished" for his role in the assault. Both are back on the beat after this limp slap on the wrist.

The case demonstrates yet again the inadequacy of allowing Inspector Knacker to investigate complaints against himself. No civilian witness was willing to cooperate with the Murkeyside police inquiry into the actions of two of its finest, and the report sent to the police complaints authority (PCA) had all the "independence" one would expect. The accused officers were subjected to nothing more rigorous than cheery interviews with a superior.

Meanwhile other OSD men are still under investigation for their riotous behaviour in Liverpool city centre last September (*Eye* 986) which, like the Valerio case, also took place after a football match. In his new year's eve message on Radio Merseyside, chief constable Norman Bettison bemoaned the cost of such investigations and suggested the money could be better spent on other things.

Such remarks do little to restore public confidence. Witnesses to the more recent episode are also reluctant to give statements to police investigating colleagues who belong to a section of the force many believe to be out of control.

It's a lawyers' fee-for-all!

BOB RUSSELL, Liberal Democrat MP for Colchester, put out a Christmas press release about the 40,000 retired workers of the once publicly-owned National Bus Company, whose pension surplus was stolen by the Tory government when the buses were privatised in 1986.

After much dawdling, and much chivvying from the *Eye*, the Labour government agreed to pay the pensioners back their money, and the department of transport handed £355m to their pension fund trustees. That was in July. Six months later, the pensioners still haven't had a penny.

The lawyers haven't suffered quite so much. Legal costs already paid by the trustees have amounted to £1.7m, and lawyers hired by the department of transport have been paid £242,000. All this money has been coughed up by the taxpayer. Most of it was unnecessary. If Tory ministers had handed over the money in 1996, as instructed by the pensions ombudsman, whom they appointed, the tortuous legal actions over the past three and a half years would have been avoided — together with the bulk of the legal costs.

Why haven't the pensioners had their money? The *Eye* asked Christopher Belk, the high-flying pensions lawyer from City solicitors Taylor Joynson Garrett. Mr Belk has been acting for the trustees since he was appointed by the official solicitor three years ago. "It's all very complicated," he explained. "The main problem is tax. We can't just pay the money out, or we would lose our Inland Revenue approval. Some of these pensioners may not have to pay tax on what they get from us, and we must know the details of their tax position before we pay out.

"These press stories will go on appearing, I suppose. We wish they wouldn't. We wish we could get rid of this quickly, and we certainly don't want to make any money out of the pensioners". Mr Belk said he had no comment on the level of lawyers' fees.

One former busman who might have ensured the trustees acted more promptly in paying the pensioners is Frank Wheeler, 71. Without Wheeler, who defied his former company, his government, a host of pension lawyers and even his union in hauling the busmen's case to the pensions ombudsman in 1996 and winning it, the theft of the pension surplus would never have been exposed. For reasons difficult to appreciate, Frank Wheeler has been treated with sustained suspicion by the official solicitor and the trustees of the pension fund. His application to be a trustee himself was turned down on the grounds that a) he was old, b) he was a bit deaf and c) he lived in Scotland.

In a characteristic fit of generosity the trustees have offered Mr Wheeler £10,000 to cover his expenses over 13 years' campaigning.

Cocker of Gold

THE phoney war between the privatised "utilities" and their regulators broke out shortly before Christmas. In a provocative press release Severn Trent, the second largest privatised water company, announced that a way had been found to pay for the 14 price cuts demanded by the water companies' regulator, Ian Byatt, otherwise known as Ofwat.

After considering the matter carefully for several weeks, the directors of Severn Water decided that 100 percent of the savings should be born by the workers. So no fewer than 1,100 workers — more than 20 percent of the entire workforce — will be sacked by this extraordinarily prosperous company in the next 18 months.

With the fairness for which the water companies have been renowned over the past decade, the directors decided that they themselves and their shareholders would not contribute a single penny to the new savings. The dividend would not be cut; neither would their own salaries; nor would any of the generous share options and incentive schemes which the directors have lavished upon themselves. Pausing only to drum up support from the unions, which slavishly followed the company line, Severn Trent directors made their announcement and waited, a little nervously, for the regulator's reaction.

They need hardly have worried. Mr Byatt, jocularly known in the trade as "water wimp", made no public criticism. Asked by the *Eye* what he thought of such a crude act of blackmail by Severn Trent, an Ofwat spokesman said: "The director [Mr Byatt] does not agree that sacking people is the only way to make the necessary savings." Asked what he proposed to do to stop the sackings, the spokesman

replied: "There is nothing he can do. All he can insist on is price reductions. How the company make those reductions is entirely a matter for them."

FACTS TO REMEMBER:

1) Dividends. Ofwat's figures for the dividends paid by the regulated water company to Severn Water plc shows that between 1994 and 1999, the company reported £1372m after tax profits of which £1275m was paid to the plc in dividends. The chief reason for this extraordinary splurge on dividends was something called a "benefit sharing package" of £421m in 1995-96.

What is a benefit sharing package? A Severn Trent spokeswoman explained that the company had had a specially good year, thanks to "efficiencies", and it was felt that shareholders should share in the benefits. Among the efficiencies of that grand year was the reduction of more than 400 in the Severn Trent workforce.

2) Share Options. Experienced *Eye* readers might recall a feature entitled SLUSH! back in 1993, in which we reported on the first great cashing-in of share options by the newly-privatised water company directors. One name mentioned there stands out today: "Victor Cocker, who was merely a director of business planning and marketing at privatisation, is now managing director and has bought and sold 80,153 shares at a profit of £181,146." Mr Cocker never looked back. He became Severn Trent group chief executive. Last year his "remuneration package" jumped to £348,000, a rise on the previous year of almost £1,000 a week. He is also a lucky participant in the company's new long-term incentive plan which promises to bring in even more goodies for the top directors than the rather old-fashioned share options. Mr Cocker is retiring soon, but he is still smiling, as you can tell from this touching (and well-publicised) photograph of him standing behind his successor Robert Walker.

[redacted]IT was business as usual for the Kelda Group, aka Yorkshire Water (*Eye* 985), when it announced 500 job cuts and blamed an Ofwat-imposed price cut — despite half-year profits of £122.2m.

While customers might worry whether a depleted workforce can deliver the goods, shareholders got an inflation-busting dividend increase of 8.1 percent and a promise that future dividends would be at least as high.

Kelda's half-year financial statement confirms that the company's agenda is clearly to move away from relying on its water and sewerage core business (regulated by the irksome Ofwat) into regulation-free zones such as land speculation, waste disposal and food testing laboratories around the world. The attraction of such non-regulated activities is that the profits can be higher.

The clever thing is that no matter how much Kelda makes in these areas, the people who pay the shareholders' dividends are still the company's long-suffering water consumers in Yorkshire. As the small print of the group's latest financial report makes clear: "The full cost of the group dividend will be met by the regulated water services business of Yorkshire Water."

Time for another windfall tax, anyone?

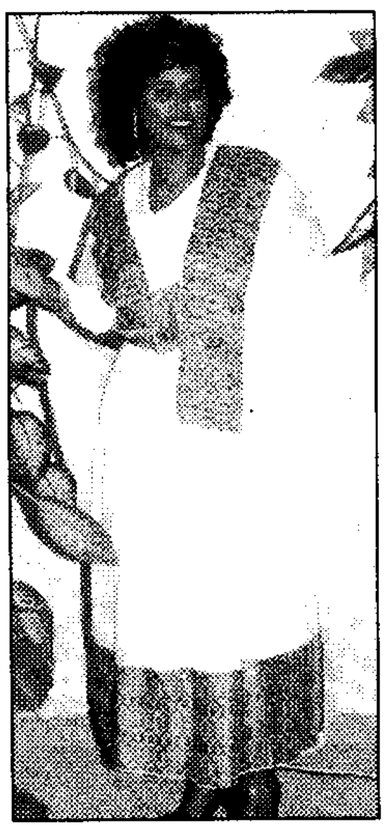
A black and white case at the zebra crossing?

BLACK people did not need Monday's home office report to confirm what they already know: that despite the Lawrence affair the Metropolitan police is still steeped in racism and getting justice can be a bitter, hollow fight.

Since July 1997 Abraha Afewerki, the consul general for Eritrea, has been locked in such a struggle after his wife Fatima was knocked down on a zebra crossing and left with devastating injuries.

Fatima, 35 and a mother or two, was a talented singer and dancer in Eritrea. Now she is tetraplegic and has only very limited use of one hand. She is doubly incontinent and needs help with the simplest daily tasks.

The driver of the car that hit her was Joan Burdett-Coutts, a relative of the up-market bankers family. She failed to stop her car immediately at the crossing in west London, but had driven away from the scene and parked around a corner before walking back.



Fatima Afewerki

Within days, and at a time when Mr Afewerki still did not know if his wife would survive, he was dismayed to receive a call from police saying that no charge was to be brought against the driver. The officer added that Mrs Afewerki's injuries did not appear so bad — he had seen her move her hand.

The diplomat was even more dismayed a week later when at the same zebra crossing police posted a notice appealing for witnesses to an accident – but not the one involving his wife. In this accident a white woman had been hit by a car. This confirmed his suspicions that officers were not bothering to investigate Fatima's accident properly.

Even with the help of the foreign office and one of Jack Straw's home office race advisers who took up the case, it was to take two and a half years before Mr Afewerki discovered just how negligent the investigation had been. An inquiry by Scotland Yard's complaints investigation bureau, subsequently supervised by the police complaints authority (PCA), revealed a catalogue of failure.

- There was little or no attempt to trace witnesses — not even the man who made the 999 call on his mobile. He was later tracked down by the CIB.
- The decision not to prosecute had been made before the expert accident report had been concluded.
- A copy of that report subsequently sent to Mr Afewerki excluded the conclusion which suggested there were grounds for a prosecution.
- Mrs Burdett-Coutts had never been formally interviewed.
- No statement was taken from Fatima until Mr Afewerki complained. Even then it was cursory: not taken by the accident squad but by a Bedfordshire officer sent to the Stoke Mandeville spinal injuries unit.
- Other statements were also deficient and inadequate information was given to the crown prosecution service (CPS).

By the time all this evidence was gathered it was too late for the CPS to bring charges. As a result of the faulty investigation, Mrs Burdett-Coutts' insurers, Royal and Sun Alliance, refused to pay any compensation to Fatima, leaving her and her family struggling to cope without proper care, equipment or support. At night an exhausted Mr Afewerki copes alone with his wife's needs.

The PCA decided that two officers "should each face a disciplinary charges of neglect of duty for their failures in connection with the investigation". But the Afewerkis then learned that a decision had been taken at the Yard that the officers face only a commander's board, not a full disciplinary board, meaning that at worst they faced loss of a week's pay. Mr Afewerki and his solicitor Paul Paxton complained again and learnt at Christmas that the officers will now face a full board and full panoply of penalties, from dismissal to demotion.

Mr Aferwerki's complaints of racism and incivility were dismissed by PCA member Caroline Mitchell. She concluded that at worst one officer had shown "a lack of sensitivity" and was "certainly tactless" when discussing Mrs Afewerki's injuries. But unlike Ms Mitchell, Mr Afewerki is far from satisfied. "I am left with no faith in the justice system. I have no doubt that had Mrs Burdett-Coutts been lying critically injured on a zebra crossing and had my wife been behind the wheel, the investigation would have taken a very different course."

Domewatch

***EYE* readers visiting the millennium dome may find the name Patientline familiar when they stumble into the "spiral of innovation" section.**

The company has been granted "millennium product" status by the Design Council and selected to showcase the best of British innovation. But readers will recall (Eye 964 and 968) how hospital workers and users complained that Patientline had ripped-off the sick and guilt-tripped their relatives by urging them to pay for an expensive bedside TV and telephone system.

Perhaps more deserving of an accolade is the nurse at St James' Hospital in Leeds, who was reprimanded by her employers for allowing cancer patients to watch a free TV when they had a perfectly good pay-through-the-nose system available from Patientline.

In the City

GEOFFREY ROBINSON has one snippet of good news amid the TransTec disaster. The initial investigation into the collapse of the Midlands engineering company he founded and where he remained the largest shareholder will be handled by Labour-friendly accountancy firm Arthur Andersen. A name not unknown to Robinson and vice versa.

Arthur Andersen was appointed receiver by TransTec's bankers, headed by the equally Robinson-friendly HSBC, whose patience finally snapped when they discovered that, like the shareholders, they had been misled for two years by sacked chief executive Richard Carr and former finance director William Jeffrey about an $18m claim from Ford.

Andersen is one of the leading insolvency practitioners, so that it should get the call is not necessarily conspiratorial. But its selection and acceptance could be open to accusations of conflict of interest and not just because it had previously done corporate finance work for TransTec.

Less obvious but more sensitive are the close links between Labour, Robinson and Andersen which provided tax expert Chris Wales as a special adviser to Robinson at the treasury.

As receivers to Hollis Industries — part of the Robert Maxwell empire — Andersen had dealings with Robinson, its former chairman. So much so that in 1998 Andersen offered free help to Robinson in rebutting claims that he had been paid £200,000 by Maxwell and that he had not disclosed this paid directorship in the MPs' register of interests. Robinson, then an influential treasury minister, asked for a bill only after Andersen's generosity was revealed.

Andersen, led by Wales, advised Labour in opposition about the planned windfall tax and corporation tax changes. This advice was paid for by Robinson through the up to £200,000 he gave pre-election to the Smith Political Economy Unit.

So the TransTec inquiries can be seen to be in safe hands should — as seems inevitable — Andersen have matters to refer to the Department of Timidity & Inaction.

But despite the Pavlovian posturings of the Tories where Robinson is concerned, it would seem that for once he is more perhaps the victim than the beneficiary of events at TransTec. Not only has Ford maintained that it had no dealings with Robinson about its claim, but he had been forced back into a non-executive chairman's role by City institutional shareholders from 1994. Carr took over as chief executive. If, as appears undisputed by events just before Christmas, the board did not know about the Ford dispute and settlement, how likely is it that Carr told Robinson, who resigned in 1997, and nobody else? How likely is it that Robinson would have *encouraged* the Orion Trust to invest £10m in TransTec shares in 1996 if he knew of the ticking Ford timebomb which arrived earlier that year? And if Robinson knew, why not sell shares, which he has not done, rather than buy?

Cynics might suggest that he had to take up the 1996 rights issue because he wanted to preserve his largest shareholder status. For the same reason, plus the fact that it would be seen as a vote of no confidence and possibly insider dealing, he could not sell. They might also point to the fact that the then finance director Jeffrey, who must have known about the Ford dispute and its implications, spent a five-figure sum buying shares in late 1997.

Certainly the TransTec collapse will hit Robinson hard. Shares that were once worth £21m are now worthless. Perhaps more significantly, also gone is the associated dividend income of £380,000 net which TransTec provided him in 1997-98. Robinson has a high burn rate lifestyle and few of his other investments, such as the *New Statesman* magazine, provide any income. The *New Statesman* indeed owes Robinson £2.5m interest free which it cannot repay.

However, Robinson's cash position has been improved by the recent sale of his Lutyens mansion in Hampshire for a suggested £5m. And he remains substantially asset rich with apartments in Cannes and a villa in Tuscany plus another Lutyens home in Surrey and a long lease Park Lane penthouse.

But the impact of TransTec on the Guernsey Family Robinson and their tax free Orion Trust could be more serious. Orion paid more than £10m for its shares in TransTec which provided a gross dividend income in excess of £400,000 a year. That has now gone and so has an investment at one time worth £15m. But the question is — did Orion borrow the £10m with which to take up Robinson's 1996 rights in TransTec? That possibility is raised by the fact that its shares like Robinson's were held in the name of the London nominee company of bankers Credit Suisse. Banks usually insist on holding shares in their nominee name when they are security for a loan. If Credit Suisse did lend Orion £10m then the trust and/or Robinson could be on a very painful and expensive hook.

Luckily both Orion and Robinson have already relieved themselves of sizeable liabilities at Coventry City soccer club. Orion paid £1.2m for a 31 percent stake which is worth much more but provides no dividend. Robinson had loaned his beloved Sky Blues £5m and influenced the trust to provide a bank guarantee of almost £10m — a highly unusual exposure for a trust. But the loan was repaid and the guarantee released in early 1998 by a new £10m loan from Midland/HSBC — Robinson's long time bankers.

That plus the sale of the Hampshire mansion suggests that Robinson and the trust should have the cash to meet any claim over TransTec. And there may also be further millions from the bountiful Belgian inheritance of his friend Joska Bourgeois which helped Robinson to fund his lifestyle. Still, there could need to be some economies, especially if in any way TransTec has any claim to Robinson's Surrey home.

The events of December — first the wholly unsurprising decision by the DTI not to mount a full-scale investigation of Robinson's Maxwell times at Hollis and TransTec's precursor, Central & Sheerwood (all a long, long time ago and anyway Cap'n Bob is dead), then the TransTec crash — should make a colourful final chapter for Robinson's planned book of revelations. But all at once the Downing Street spin machine is predicting/hoping there will be no book!

However, this seems a case of the wish being father to the "fact". The publishers say the book is still going ahead. So we may yet hear from the man who really knows just how much the dear leader and the iron chancellor as well as Peter Mandelson and the party received in hospitality, home loans, gifts and donations from generous Geoffrey.

In The Stocks

Lord Blyth & John McGrath

DIAGEO chief executive John McGrath becomes BOOTS chairman this year, replacing Lord Blyth of Rowington – who takes over at DIAGEO. You can see why.

Value today of £100 invested in...

£78	£63	£118
Diageo	Boots	The rest of the stock market

D-DAY IS approaching for the Serious Farce Office on fugitive spiv Andrew Regan. The SFO has to decide on pressing the extradition button that could eject Regan from his Monaco bolt hole. This decision may have to be taken before his three co-defendants in the £2.4m bribe case appear for the first time at Bow Street magistrates court in London next week.

The SFO has been trying to persuade Regan to come back voluntarily to face the music! One theory for this limp policy — which has angered police investigators — is that Regan may be able to argue that the alleged theft offences are too old — 1994 and 1995 — to be covered by the extradition treaty with Monaco which dates back to the last century when legal matters were a lot simpler.

If the theft charges are out of time then the SFO could be starting the new year with a very red face.

THE Gnome Institute for Greed Management proudly announces its 1999 awards for achievement in white collar crime. The winners are:

Crook of the Year: American Martin Frankel who stole at least $100m by fooling impressionable regulators, the religious needy and the rich greedy that he had made billions.

Newcomer of the Year: Late developer Hugh Eaves, 56, who helped himself to £15m belonging to his former Phillips & Drew partners without their noticing for more than a decade.

Comeback of the Year: This could only go to Kevin Maxwell with his porn-powered Telemonde bubble stock, which with its cash problems and his crocodile tear-stained promises of good deeds, shows that he is very much his father's son.

Escaper of the Year: Jointly shared by Railtrack and Great Western Trains who proved once again that unlike individuals, profit-mad companies and their bonus-driven directors can kill and get away with it.

'Slicker'

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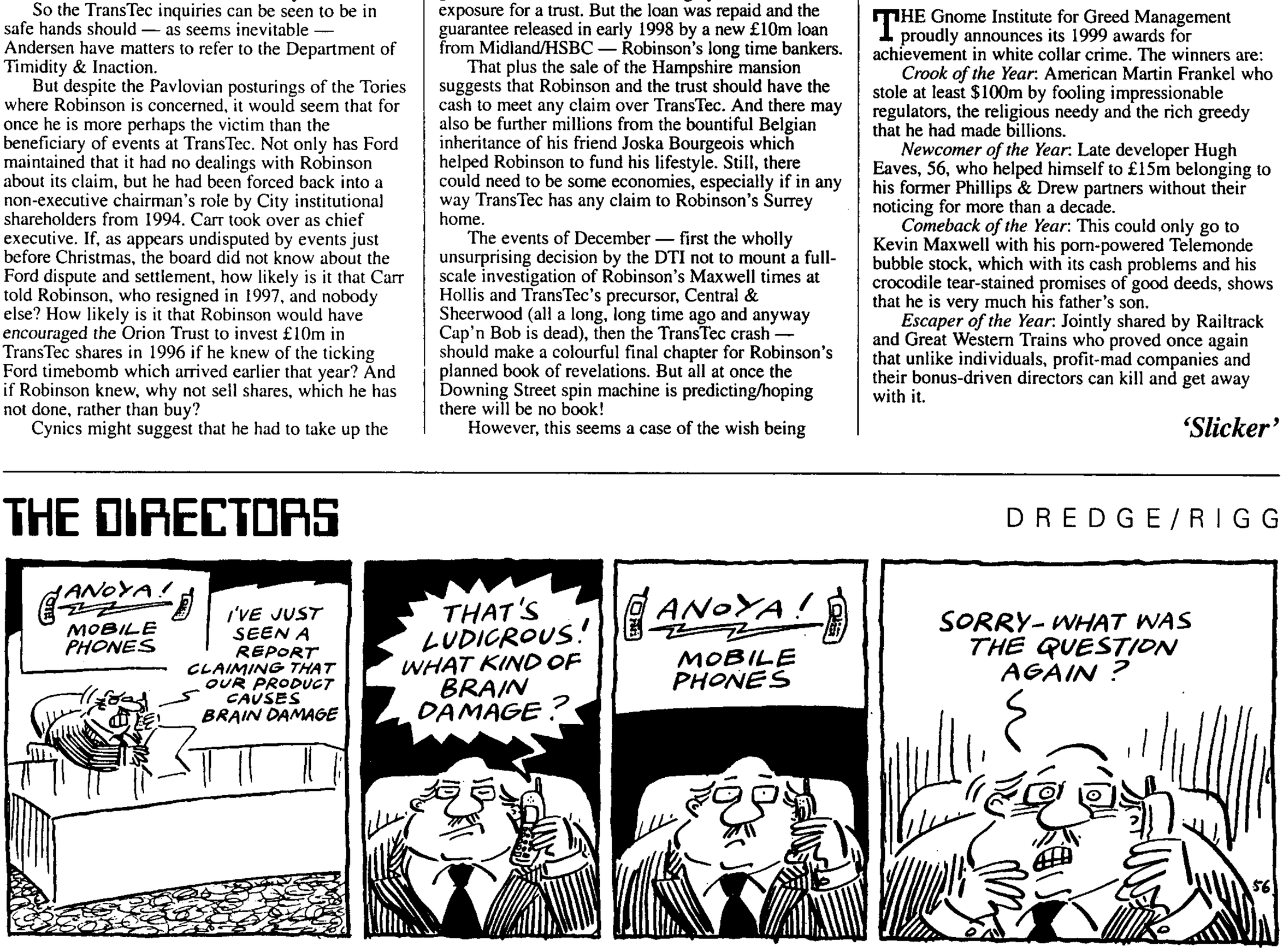
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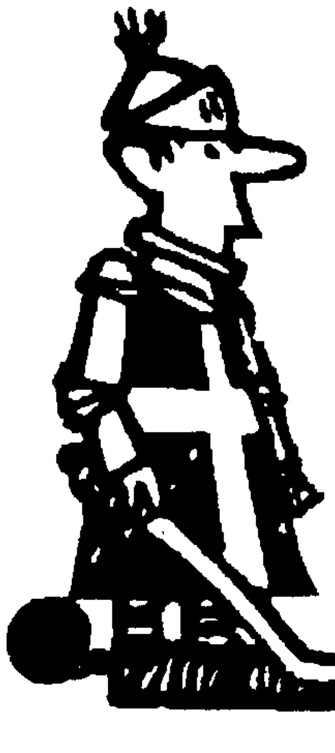

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(That's enough reasons – Ed.)

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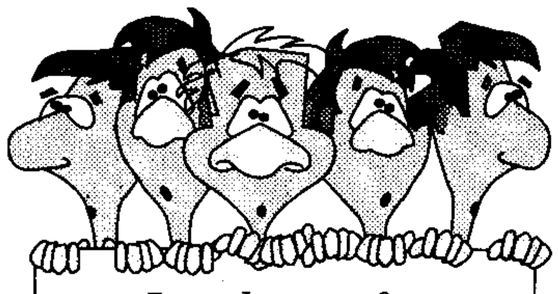

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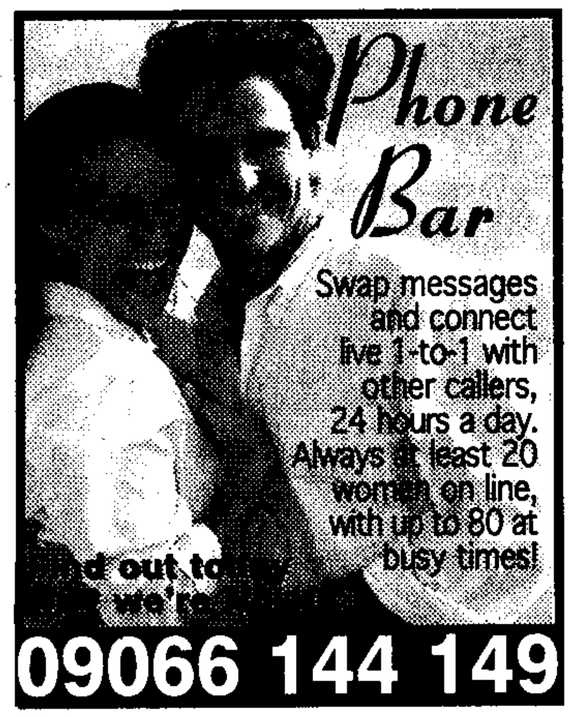
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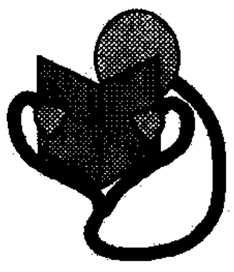

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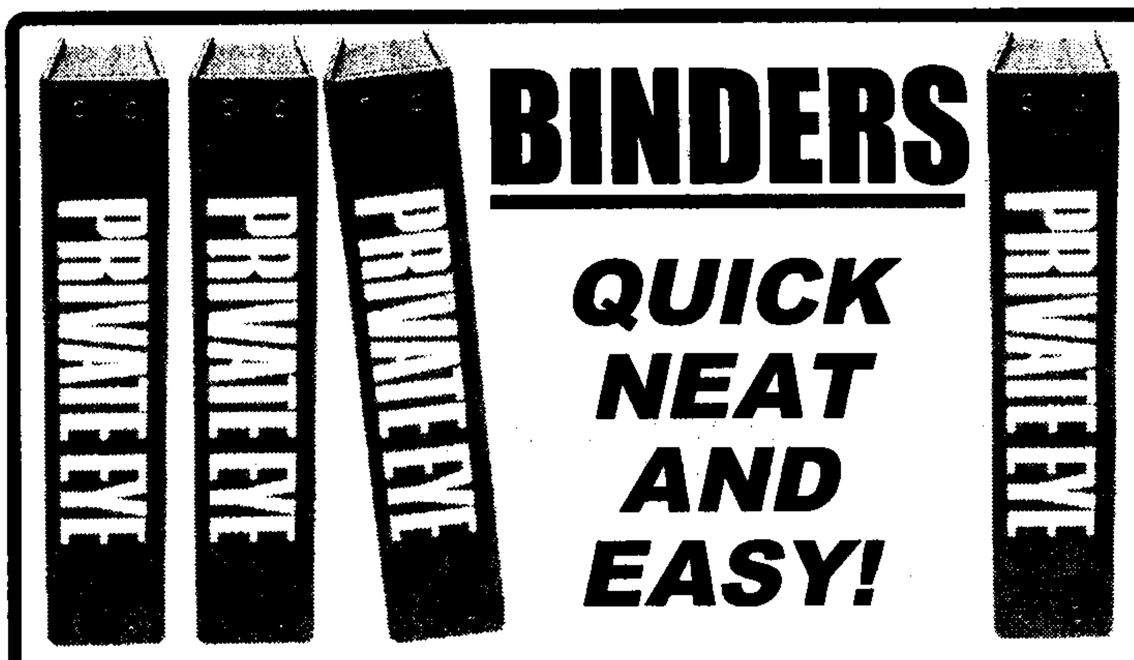

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LONDONER'S DIARY, Evening Standard

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SPEECHWRITING by Mitch Murray – see page 31...

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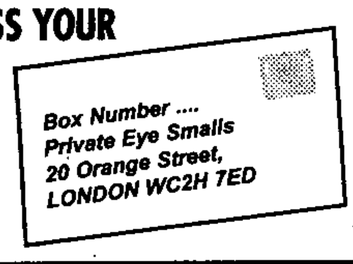

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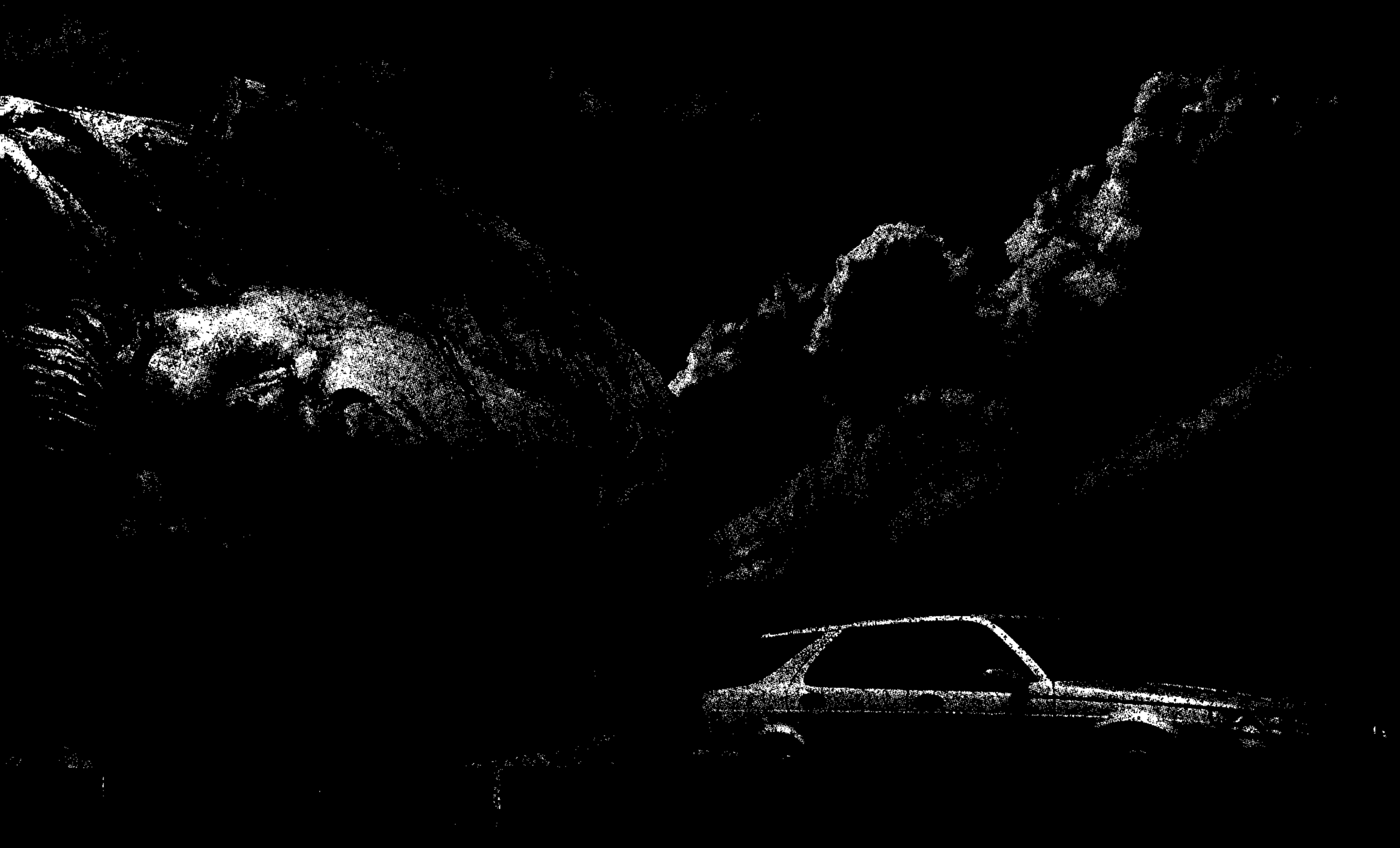

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